

By James Agate



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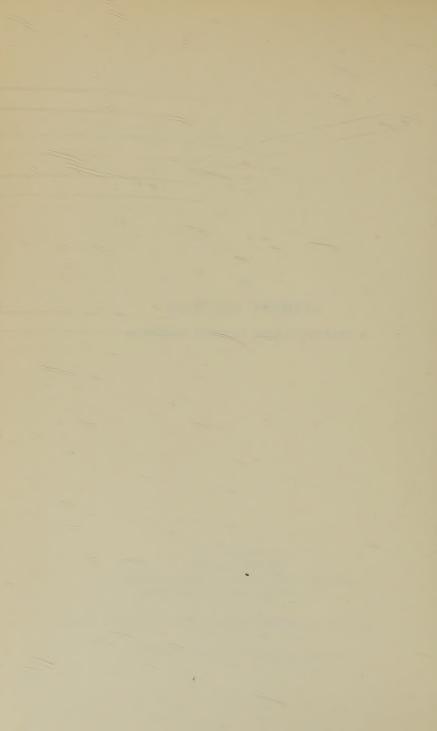
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ANTHONY BERTRAM

A DRAMATIC CRITIC WITHOUT PORTFOLIO



Preface

THIS book is frankly a collection of weekly articles which have appeared in the columns of The Saturday Review and The Sunday Times.

To republish a "notice" of every production throughout the twelvemonth is both undesirable and impracticable. I have hoped, however, by devoting a section to each kind of theatrical enterprise, to present a general view of the theatre in 1923. Musical comedy alone has been omitted, for the reason that the year's examples in this style appear to me to be unworthy of serious consideration. The articles appear exactly as they were written, and such expressions as "on Monday last" have been retained to mark the sense of current criticism. The book is possibly the first of a series.

I offer the usual acknowledgments to the Proprietors of the journals concerned.

J. A.

December 1923.



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The Point of View

IT is only good manners that a critic should take an early opportunity of imitating the old writer whose bill of fare exposed "what kind of history this is; what it is like, and what it is not like." Let me declare what kind of criticism it will be that I hope to write, and what kind it will not be.

I was bred to the theatre, and trace descent from Edward Shuter, the original Hardcastle in She Stoops to Conquer. "This fine comedian," says Mantzius, "was exceedingly religious, a great drinker, and of a bottomless ignorance, barely able to read his parts and totally unable to write, yet possessed when sober of a natural wit." Hence is bred in me the love of artistry of all sorts, and of every kind of mountebanking. I have never deemed the drama to be higher than any other art. It is livelier, more immediately emotional, more "get-at-able," though I doubt whether, even in its most austere form, it is more than holily scarifying. It lacks the healing power of great music, great painting, and great poetry. The grandest speech in Shakespeare, the most poignant of the situations in Æschylus, seem to me to fall below the emotion of certain pictures of Raphael and Michael Angelo, certain scores of Beethoven and Wagner,

certain passages of Wordsworth. Yet for none of these, as a schoolboy, would I have played truant as I frequently did for the theatre. This is largely the result of Puritan influence. In my young days the playhouse was deemed faintly improper, and a visit to it a backsliding; whereas I was trotted by the hand through picture-galleries and urged to classical concerts. Even now I regard a visit to the play as slightly wicked, and it occurs to me that probably the best way to "save the theatre" would be to proscribe it to the youngsters, and tell them that the pictures—meaning the cinema—are more wholesome.

During my early years I read every morsel of dramatic criticism available-Shaw, Archer, Walkley, Max, even Clement Scott. In the Manchester Press there were W. T. Arnold, Oliver Elton, C. E. Montague and Allan Monkhouse, and I laid out my weekly shilling strictly as these mentors advised. To-day London is full of frivolous people who need not regret too bitterly a guinea thrown away upon an entertainment lacking beauty and interest, pathos and humour, wit and polish—in short, no entertainment at all. But there must also be very many readers of every newspaper who have one half-crown and one evening a week to spare for the theatre. and no more. To these a disappointment is a grave matter. It is, I must believe, the people with a serious interest in the theatre-whether they have a guinea or only a half-crown to be serious with-who

are a dramatic critic's chief concern. A theatre cannot live by its stalls alone, nor yet by its pit. It must have both, and I believe that if managers will only look after the cheap seats, the dear ones will look after themselves. The pit is the soul of the playhouse, and I am not sure that it is not also the brains. What actor ever cried, "Gad, sir, the dress circle rose at me!"

This brings me to the question: Which are the theatres whose pits a dramatic critic must try to fill? The answer is: Every theatre; with discrimination, but without distinction. Personally, I would rather see a play by Shakespeare, Ibsen, Tchehov, Shaw, Galsworthy, Drinkwater, O'Neill, Synge, Pinero, Jones, Barrie, Hankin, Chapin, Davies or Munro performed with moderate competence than the most sparkling musical comedy or alert revue. But that is a personal predilection which may not be the reader's. I can only set forth how near, in my humble opinion, author and actor have attained to the goal which they have themselves set up. The relative value of the goals is a matter for the reader to determine for himself: not their absolute worth, but their importance to him. If I pronounce Robert E. Lee to be the best play in London, it is because it is the finest work of the finest mind on current playbills. The reader prefers musical comedy? The Merry Widow is delightful. Does he like plays about thick ears? The Dancers is the perfect cauliflower.

I love the theatre, then, in all its manifestations,

and in every width and height of brow, from the tenth-rate provincial pantomime to Greek tragedy in a chalk-pit on a wet afternoon. And if I cotton more easily to the former than to the latter it is because I am English and not Greek, and because the English genius runs naturally to a magnificent buffoonery. Understatement and shyness of emotion are characteristics of the English race; nervous excitability bespeaks the Frenchman and Italian. We are proud of our Saxon phlegm; the Latin abounds in his own temperament like a baby splashing in its bath. We do not, to change the metaphor, expect the foreigner to stand up to fast bowling on a bumpy wicket—that is not in his genius. Why should we be ashamed that all that laying bare of the soul which is tragic acting should not be our line? We cannot have our cake and eat it; keep our "good form" and lose it too. And so publicly! Always I have the suspicion that if Caruso had been at Oxford he would not have made quite such an "exhibition" of himself in "On with the Motley!"

In other words, the English react more easily to comedy than to tragedy. Once in two or three generations arrives a Kean or an Irving; every five years throws up its Billy Merson. At the moment we have no "serious" actor or actress of the very highest class. But look at the comic stage. Lauder, Nellie Wallace, the Brothers Griffiths, and that rubicund assistant of Mr. Harry Tate, the unnamed ancient who wears a bowler hat one size too small and

a smile one size too large—these are a random handful who, surely, possess the indefinable quality of genius. To seize upon the high quality of the actor, whether he be tragedian or buffoon, and to make eager distinctions among the smaller fry is half of the dramatic critic's duty.

The play is the other half. But a "play" is, by the meaning of the word, something performed by actors. "Literary" criticism of the drama seems to me a dead and useless thing, for the simple reason that the "literary" drama does not exist. Whatever masquerades between covers under that name may be literature, but it is not the play. Not the book then, but the acted drama's the thing wherein to catch the conscience of your dramatic critic.

No reader of *The Sunday Times* can have turned more assiduously to Mr. Sydney Carroll's column than I; zest for our common theatre was sure to meet with zest. Whatever view one might hold as to the vitality or decadence of the English stage, here was a critic who was magnificently alive and, at his meridian, still retained the hot fit of youth. In theory, two of the most valuable assets of a critic are containment and measure; in practice, these too often become contentment and half-measure. From such weaknesses Mr. Carroll was entirely free; he was never too easily pleased, and always he spoke his whole mind.

Since the critic's first duty is to his readers, it follows that no quality except sincerity will, in the long run,

avail him. As the old fogey in the play might have observed, for the critic to be true to himself is the only way of not being false to his public. He must be "jannock," as we say in Lancashire. He is to put his reader in possession, not necessarily of absolute truth, but of the whole truth as it is known to him. As play or actor strike him, so exactly will he set them down. Uncompromising honesty, then, seems to me to be the first qualification for a critic; cleverness comes after.

"Les plus sages ne le sont pas toujours." No man can be always wise, and it is good that a writer should not always find his reader in agreement. Nobody likes to go on saying "Amen" for ever and ever. Occasional and even fantastic wrong-headedness is better than perfunctory acquiescence; and one can say confidently of Carroll that no critic was ever more in earnest or less influenced by the opinions of others. He struck out his own "line," and listened only to his proper heart-beats. There was something more than life-size about the gusto with which he drove his pen up and down his columns. You might have said a fire-engine careering to the rescue of women and children in burning upper storeys. Every Sunday morning you could be sure that somewhere between Whitechapel and Hampstead there had been a play or a player to be got safely to ground. Every week had its fire for this critic and, by faithful reflection, for his readers. Carroll warmed both hands before these periodical conflagrations, and made us sensible of their cheer. There was something of the true dementia even about this writer's hates. It was once said that the difference between Duse and Bernhardt might be summed up in this: that when Duse rounded upon an enemy you watched the effect of the reproach upon the utterer; but that when Sarah let the fellow have it you looked to see which particular board in the stage had opened to swallow him up. Carroll's whirlwinds were of the latter order. If his victims bore astonishingly little malice, appearing in the next piece as though they had not been utterly and for ever demolished, it was because their destroyer had used none. That the wounds of a critic shall be faithful is my second axiom.

My third and last principle is that the critic must wear his heart where Carroll wore it—on his sleeve. Often the emotion behind his column has been so strong that I have found myself echoing the old courtier's "Look, whether he has not tears in's eyes." This is an effect outside the scope of contrivance, to be attained only by singleness of purpose. To seek beauty singly and declare it unashamed is the whole function of criticism, as I see it. And so, I think, Carroll saw it through five honourable years.

A Critic's Handbook

WE are witnessing the rebirth of the drama, if not of the theatre. All the signs are healthy. The experimental, play-producing societies are drawing immense audiences; playgoers' clubs, assembling on Sunday nights, present the lecturer with a muster of five hundred souls thirsty for mere talk about plays; the output of new dramatists at home, on the Continent, in America, is enormous—much of it excellent in quality and a good deal of it new in kind. Publishers are alive to the renascence, and from their houses comes a steady stream of plays and books about plays, which are begged, borrowed, and stolen as never before. Now and again, even, one is bought!

The latest critical volume is The Youngest Drama, by Mr. Ashley Dukes (Ernest Benn Ltd., 8s. 6d.). The author dedicates his book to "the youngest dramatists." He might have said that it is by the youngest critic. For Mr. Dukes is the most youthful of all who ply that trade, not in the sense of learning or authority, but in the one way in which youth counts—enthusiasm. He has that fresher zeal which is the polite and moral justification of those who, in any walk of life, knock so insistently at elder doors. For

him Ibsen cannot be too heavy, nor Milne too light. For him Paris, Vienna, Budapest, Moscow, Hampstead even, are not too far away; nor is he discommoded by the Waterloo Road. His book is admirable. It contains the right kind of challenge and provocation.

Mr. Dukes ascribes to the playwrights of yesterday, euphemistically called Forerunners, "the creative impulse of the youngest drama." This, I submit with all deference, is mistaken. Creative impulse comes from within, not from without; the form which that impulse takes is another matter. It is to be thought that Mr. St. John Ervine would have written Jane Clegg even if he had never read a word of Ibsen, that Mr. Eugene O'Neill would have delivered himself of Fog, Thirst, and Anna Christie without the help of Synge, Diff'rent without Mr. Masefield, and The Emperor Jones without Maeterlinck. The æsthetic tub, if it be worthy to be called a tub, stands on its own bottom.

Even in the matter of form the tide does not flow all one way. In the youngest drama the criss-cross is persistent-Claudel setting a mediæval sail, Capek getting up the full steam of modern economics. It is not for his handling of the general drift, the existence of which one denies, that Mr. Dukes is immensely to be praised, but for his treatment of individual playwrights.

These pages show a rare talent for epitome—in the case of the Forerunners almost for epitaph. Of D'Annunzio we read:

In the perspective of his dramas rise the pillars of classical form, and in the foreground move figures who recall the art of the Italian masters. And yet a shimmer of banality overspreads the whole. The tragic sense merges into the sensational. The symbolic conception is slurred by the sentimental. The fantasy withers in the torrid heats of emphasis. This airman, indeed, never falls to earth, but he soars into the empyrean with all the facility of journalism.

This is good criticism. "The beauty of rationalism" is to be found in Mr. Granville Barker's work. Sir Arthur Pinero "identified himself, in spite of his better nature, with the egregious respectability of Aubrey Tanqueray, with the minatory trumpetings of Cayley Drummle to his fellows of the smoking-room herd. He threw Paula to the Victorians. . . ." Mr. Shaw is that "incredible phenomenon, a snow-clad volcano in eruption." But for his moral passion "all is frozen thought." His air is "rarefied and mistless." Sudermann's Magda is "the queen of parlour melodramas." Zola's Thérèse Raquin is "Sophoclean tragedy in a back bedroom." There is wit and wisdom here.

This book has, it must be confessed, something of the air of the register kept in cemetery lodges. Of yesterday's playwrights, Mr. Drinkwater alone lives on into the youngest class. Even Messrs. Ervine, Munro, and O'Neill must be quaking in their shoes. The title "Forerunner" is suspended over their heads. As these are, so they must shortly be!

Let them take heart, and answer their monitor with a bold "Not so shortly, friend, as thou imaginest!"

The expressionists and poets, Claudel and Company, gather bee-wise in this critic's bonnet, and once, at least, he is stung. "When this epic of character (Hassan) is unfolded on the stage, shall we talk of literature or pageantry? No, this is drama, if the word have any meaning." Whereas Hassan in performance proves a drama with a broken back. Mr. Dukes declares the confectioner's silence in the trial scene to be eloquent; actually we feel that Flecker forgot all about him. This is, perhaps, the reason for the play's delay. What actor-manager could be expected to brook being forgotten?

I venture to suggest that our critic undervalues Capus and Mr. Henry Arthur Jones. More, I imagine, is to be said for such brilliant comedy as The Liars, than that it "amused the fashionable public of a period when the bustle was just going out and the motorcar was just coming in." Mr. Jones, at his best, would divert the intelligent public of any day. But these are tiny flaws. The book, which is much too short, is of great value. The writing has wit and style, the thought a quality of earnestness and dignity. The theatre has been considered worthy of sober and serious treatment. The reader is no true playgoer who, after studying it, does not clamour for English performance of many of these plays, and in particular, Crommelynck's Le Cocu Magnifique.

Mr. Drinkwater and St. John Hankin

R. DRINKWATER'S Introduction to Mr. Martin Secker's new and handsome edition of St. John Hankin's plays (two volumes, 25s. net) is "frightfully" good, of course, if a trifle portentous. How tickled that master of light comedy would have been to find himself in the same galley with Sophocles, or exercising with Greek nicety the "privilege of choric commentary"!

This Introduction reads very much less like a preparation for Hankin than a defence of Drinkwater. "The dramatist whose characters are set out photographically, not reflected through the distinctive medium of his own personality, does not create at all." In other words, we are not to look to Mr. Drinkwater for photographs of Lincoln or Lee, Cromwell or Mary Stuart. Well, it's an old claim. We should not look to Claude, Corot, or Constable for a photograph of King Charles's Oak, but for a record of "tree-ish" emotion. Each painter would produce his own individual tree, which would, however, remain recognisably an oak. The difficulty with Mr. Drinkwater is an occasional distortion of vision none the

Mr. Drinkwater and St. John Hankin

less false because it is ennobling. He beholds a French poplar shimmering with frailty, and it appears on his canvas as the staidest of weeping willows. Would Darnley or Bothwell or Riccio, or even her own mother, have recognised this Mary Stuart? Is this Cromwell, speaking a "poor, confused word for freedom," the man who made himself so straightforwardly tyrannical at Drogheda? A more "real" Protector is to be found in Little Arthur:

This Cromwell was a Puritan, or Roundhead. He was brave and very sagacious, and very strictly religious, according to his own notions, though some men thought him a hypocrite; at all events, he was always thinking how he could make himself the greatest man in England.

Here, surely, is perfect art—palpable truth reflected in the distinctive medium of Lady Callcott. Yet both *Mary Stuart* and *Cromwell*, though sovereignly untrue, are exquisite works.

Mr. Drinkwater insists that a play must not be an unshaped extract from life. Agreed. Rembrandt, by omission and emphasis, is "truer" to his subject than the unselective photographer. In the same way the artificial and purged expression of the dramatist is more lifelike than the comprehensive notebooks of the shorthand reporter. From this we are to deduce that the greatest drama is the poetic drama. "The stage cannot regain its full vigour until it has rediscovered poetry as its natural expression." Here it is time to call a halt. Poetic drama, between the

covers of a book—yes! On the stage—no! Or not until such time as our poets take to conceiving drama as something that happens later than the days of Beowulf.

Let me confess that whenever I see the words "poetic drama" my heart sinks. They ought to mean that Mr. Masefield is putting into the form of highest poignancy some human story like that of the Widow in the Bye Street. What they mean in actual practice is that some vague soul has lost itself in the mists surrounding Boadicea.

Positively I cannot find it in my heart to blame people who tell me that they cannot sit through modern poetic drama. Neither can I. "Action is not essential to the stage, but in its absence there must be some direct progression of idea or spiritual conflict that shall perform its office of holding the attention of an audience." In theory, admirable! But in practice? Ibsen's plays are full of spiritual conflict; but how many people can be got together in this country to test their power of holding attention? Action may not be essential to the stage, but the fact remains that where it is lacking so, too, are the audiences.

This Introduction does not tell us how amusing Hankin's plays are, how full of drawing-room action, how constantly they excite the two great questions: "What will A say to that?" "What will B do next?" Mr. Drinkwater praises Hankin for helping to revive the theatre's old relation to literature. But could

Mr. Drinkwater and St. John Hankin

any recommendation be better calculated to put the playgoer off? Better the assurance that in the theatre the liaison is unnoticeable. Better some hint as to the immense fun of these excellent comedies. But it may be that fun is not Mr. Drinkwater's forte.

Whenever I think of Hankin's plays one scene crops up. It is the end of the second act of The Charity that Began at Home. Earlier in the act Lady Denison's butler, Soames, has declared that, being married, he is unable to make amends to the lady's-maid whom he has betrayed. Lady Denison's charitable views incline her to retain the man in her service. And then Marjory Denison must needs become engaged to an undesirable! This is altogether too much for her mother, who says, "I don't mind asking the wrong people to my house and trying to make them happy, but I can't have them proposing to my daughter. I must make a stand against it all, now, at once, while I remember." She goes to the bell. "What are you going to do?" asks her sister. "Dismiss Soames!"

This single stroke is worth a wilderness of theorising.

A Hint to Repertory Theatres

OXFORD launched her Repertory Theatre on Monday last. Mr. Shaw's Heartbreak House was the play chosen, and I hear satisfactory accounts of the first performance. The company's repertory includes the best comedy of Wilde and of St. John Hankin, Goldoni's La Locandiera, Ibsen's Master Builder, Musset's On ne badine pas avec l'Amour, and The Rivals. This is a magnificent list, and I confess to rubbing my eyes on reading in a paper the quaint statement that "one object of Mr. Fagan's scheme is to avoid highbrowism, and make the new theatre a place of entertainment."

What a confusion of thought have we here! If "highbrowism" means anything at all, and is not simply the sneer of the illiterate, it means the attitude towards life and art of an intelligent and educated mind. There are, of course, the pseudo-highbrows, pretenders who strike attitudes with nothing behind them, but we need not bother ourselves unduly about these. We remember the unnamed clergyman who asked Johnson whether Dodd's sermons were not addressed to the passions, and the annihilatory

A Hint to Repertory Theatres

"They were nothing, Sir, be they addressed to what they may." The false highbrows are in like case with that diminished clergyman, or even with the unfortunate Dodd himself: they are nothing. Each playwright in the Oxford list was a highbrow in his day; Mr. Shaw is the highbrow par excellence of ours. Yet the writer whose remark I have quoted would appear to place them in the category of master-entertainers. He is right here; it is his understanding of "highbrowism" which is wrong.

One curious thing is noticeable—that all the dramatists whose works are to be produced at Oxford are, with one exception, dead. Now it may be held that to foster the work of living playwrights is as much the business of a repertory theatre as to rejuvenate old masterpieces. The answer, no doubt, will be the familiar one: that there are no works being produced to-day worth fostering. This is either a parrot-cry or it is, again, nothing. I have just received from Messrs. Ernest Benn Ltd., Mr. Allan Monkhouse's new four-act play, The Conquering Hero (3s. 6d. net). I do not hesitate to say that this is one of the finest pieces for the stage written by an Englishman since the war, and the product of one of the most delicately conditioned and percipient minds which have ever ennobled the English theatre.

Mr. Monkhouse's earlier comedies, Mary Broome and The Education of Mr. Surrage, have been acted in Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham, and one of them has been performed with

success in America. They have not been performed in London. This author's novels have earned the respectful admiration of all thoughtful readers. They are caviare to the pseudo-highbrow and the chatterers at literary tea-parties. Let me admit that there is nothing of the beanfeast about Mr. Monkhouse's latest play. It is a serious, inspiring, and, be it said, an exacting play. It will inspire none but the serious-minded: yet its appeal is made in the true medium of the theatre.

The Conquering Hero is a play about War, and the artist's objection to that relic of barbarism. I shall be told, I suppose, that the subject is a Jonah, that this is not the time, and the theatre is not the place, to discuss it. It would appear that, for serious subjects, the place and time are never here and now. It is apparently as tactless to discuss the abstract morality of War after it happens as it is wanting in taste to argue about political principle when a particular war is in being.

We used to be asked, if we don't take a wee drop of whisky after the labours of the day, when do we take a wee drop of whisky? If we are not to discuss an age-long problem in the light in which we can see it best, when are we to discuss it? The astronomer who would make up his mind about Mars chooses that planet's nearest approach to the earth. So the serious playwright. Theatre-managers would do well to take a hint from the films here. Cinemagoers must have noticed that the most popular present-

A Hint to Repertory Theatres

day "pictures" are those which "flash-back" to the war. Mr. Monkhouse flashes back, but his light is that of a steady mind.

Christopher and Stephen Rokeby are the sons of Colonel Rokeby, an old soldier who has never been in action. He is not a fool. His daughter, Margaret, is married to a Captain Iredale, who, also, is not a fool, and envisages his duty simply. Stephen is a clergyman, and his attitude and that of his father are told with superb economy. It is the 4th of August 1914. The Colonel enters.

STEPHEN (eagerly). Good news?

COL. ROKEBY. The best! We shall be at war with Germany by midnight.

STEPHEN (to Chris.). Untold suffering. Misery and desolation.

Christopher, too, has his objections, but they are those of the artist who wants to pursue his work, and in the artists of all the countries of the world sees brothers. "Puisqu'il n'est qu'un ciel, pourquoi tant de patries?" sums him up. Yet this, like all summaries, needs expanding. Helen, his fiancée, tackles him:

HELEN. How can you desert your father? You talk of your own individual soul. A traitor may have that.

CHRIS. What is a traitor?

HELEN. Simple people know.

CHRIS. Yes. Those that we call traitors may be the heroes—the men of conscience and ideals. It's my work to look into men's souls. It's truth I want, not this blatant simplicity. We are to be all one way now. What a time! The day of the cheap patriot has come.

HELEN. Not so cheap if he gives his life.

Helen refers her lover to Rossetti on the refusal of aid between nations. This, you see, is a world where poets influence men's hearts, and are not mere lumber on a drawing-room table. The dialogue resumes:

CHRIS. Yes, it's splendid. I'm glad you showed me that.

HELEN. You'll go if the poets lead?

CHRIS. There are German poets, too.

HELEN. But you're not a German.

Christopher turns over an illustrated paper and stops at a picture of the Kaiser.

CHRIS. Rather a stupid man—but exalted. There's a sort of nobility about him.

HELEN. Oh! I hate you.

CHRIS. And yet you'd have me like that. Here's your ideal. Here's the concentrated essence of the patriot. Here's my country, right or wrong.

HELEN (snatching the paper). I never thought it would end like this.

CHRIS. End? End?

HELEN. We are thousands of miles apart.

CHRIS. Because we know one another a little better.

HELEN. Good-bye.

chris. Good-bye, Helen.

If this is not quality in dialogue, informed by a serene and lofty mind, let me never visit the play again!

Stephen enlists; Dakin, the footman, enlists; and ultimately Christopher, praying that it is the spirit and not the drum which beats in his temples, goes too. He may be paraphrased: "All war is damnable; I shall be a scoundrel if I keep out of this." We see dreadful things happening to him in

A Hint to Repertory Theatres

France, where, for a moment, his spirit gives out, and he prepares to kneel to a Prussian officer. In the event he does not disgrace himself as courts-martial understand disgrace. But he returns home invalided, with a great misgiving in his soul. His people meet him at the station with a band. Dakin, the footman, Iredale, his brother-in-law, Stephen, the brother with whom he could have talked—all are dead. And they meet him with a band! I do not hope to explain in a few words a character the psychology of which the author takes a whole evening to explore. My readers must take it from me that the play is profoundly troubling. This story of a soldier going unwillingly to the wars is moving in a way which the concocters of sentimentalities, not even decently pornographic, seem utterly unable to conceive.

If Mr. Monkhouse were a Russian, and called Monkoussikoff, I have no doubt that his work would create a furore. But in spite of his being an Englishman, I recommend this great play to the Repertory Theatres of Birmingham, Liverpool, Oxford, and, later, Bristol. I recommend it to the Everyman Theatre and the Theatre Guild, to the Stage Society, the Play Actors, and the Repertory Players. It will be interesting to see who speaks first. And I recommend the part of Christopher to the attention of Messrs. Leon Quartermaine, Leon M. Lion, and Milton Rosmer. No one who saw the first-named actor's Uncle Vanya and has read this play can doubt that actor and part were made for each other. I do not

recommend the piece to the London commercial managers. It is not, in their sense of the word, "a winner." I am often asked what I call a great play. This is one. I should judge it to be as effective on the stage as Tchehov.

Two Producers

M. GORDON CRAIG'S Scene is a fanfare in this author's most pontifical style. It is published by the Oxford University Press at the price of 25s., is beautifully got up, and contains nineteen handsome plates, with a Foreword and an Introductory Poem, also very handsome, by Mr. John Masefield. Mr. Frank Vernon's Modern Stage Production is published by the Stage, at three shillings and sixpence. These books should be read together. Mr. Craig is a master of rodomontade, Mr. Vernon the apostle of common sense. Scene sets forth what the Theatre would be like if we were content to turn it overauthor, actor, decorator, machinist, electrician, seller of programmes and cloak-room attendant-to the comprehensive suzerainty of an idealist. Mr. Vernon's little book contains the creed of one who is not ashamed to work in the theatre as it is.

Mr. Craig has a "grouse"—I can find no other word—against the English Theatre. Mr. Masefield puts it nobly, but I think unfairly. "The Theatre Exhibition proved that England has noble imaginations in her theatre, but her theatre at present is not using them." If by this is meant simply that the Exhibition contained models by artists who have not

been enlisted on the working stage, all well and good. But if it be implied that the English Theatre is not using men of noble imagination, then I most emphatically disagree. This would be to overlook the work of Lovat Fraser and Norman Wilkinson, also the admirable productions at the Everyman Theatre and the "Old Vic." "The purpose of Mr. Craig's book is to display the work of this artist and to suggest what it might do in the theatre of to-day if employed." Why, the reader asks himself, cannot Mr. Craig's work be employed? The answer is contained in two words—Mr. Craig.

To put it in the plainest possible way, Mr. Craig is unemployable. He says categorically: "I am not, alas! a purveyor of sceneries for other people." This, is the attitude of a soldier who will not fight except in the capacity of Commander-in-Chief, preferring to lay down his arms and write letters to the Press showing, with model and diagram, how battles might be won. Mr. Craig demands the best theatre in Europe, and refuses to accept a makeshift. And by the best theatre in Europe we are to understand the theatre controlled and directed by Mr. Craig. "It should be the pleasure and duty of all workers in the Dramatic Art to put the Drama in order again, and the Master of the Drama in his place—at the head of all."

I do not deny that Mr. Craig is a genius. He possesses, indeed, extraordinary genius in a number of ways. He is a great designer of scenery, and a master of the art of writing. He has imagination,

insight, enthusiasm, largeness of conception, and a faculty for poetry. I do not know whether Mr. Craig is an actor of genius; we are told only that he is "primarily an actor." Possibly, in this line, I shall be safe in ranking him with Shakespeare and Sir Arthur Pinero. But even genius can ask too much, and Mr. Craig's demand is simply that the theatre shall be the expression of Mr. Craig. There is the further difficulty that there is no guarantee as to which particular one of all these geniuses we are to get. There are so many of them; souvent Craig varie; bien fou qui s'y fie! The patron who would build a vessel for this master is very much in the position of a shipbuilder who should construct a fishing-smack and find that next month the captain insists on its being turned into a lighthouse. There was a time when Mr. Craig was all for the total elimination of the actor, and I have never been able to understand how this ruthless artist, in his production of Much Ado about Nothing, could entrust the part of Beatrice to Miss Ellen Terry when, on his own showing, a more exquisite exponent of the part could have been fashioned out of papier mâché. But Mr. Craig has thrown marionettes over and come back to the actor, about whom there is nothing wrong at the moment, except his surroundings.

Mr. Craig has been examining man's habitation from prehistoric times with the idea of rejecting every feature which is not common to them all. He has found that the essential parts are the walls, floor,

ceiling, and nothing else. Hence it follows that the actor's scene shall, in future, be composed of plain, flat walls which may be equally mud hut, temple, Palais de Versailles, or Mr. Harrod's shop.

Obviously the same four walls cannot be all four places, but we are assured that by Mr. Craig's new system of screens and lighting they can seem like four, or four hundred, places. It is all a matter of pulleys, wheels, and grooves. But suppose, Mr. Craig asks, that with his switchboard working satisfactorily we still do not behold what he intends us to behold? The answer is that there will always be thirty people out of eighty who do not see as the other fifty see; that he cannot help it; that it has always been so. In other words, this heaven-sent scheme is foredoomed to 37½ per cent. failure. Mr. Craig regrets that he cannot go fully into details, lest they be caught up by some ever-ready theatre manager and put before us with something less than perfection. Either it is to be Mr. Craig who shall show the thing to us or we are not to see it at all. And we shall not see it, Mr. Masefield hints, until some rich man, with a sense of style, builds a theatre for Mr. Craig. Until this happens this artist will, I suppose, continue to sulk beneath his Italian canopy and give us from time to time his volumes of pretty drawings and precious sentences. Does Mr. Craig not realise that Mr. Robert Atkins is doing more service to the theatre by one Saturday night's practice at the "Old Vic." than he can achieve in ten years of polemics de luxe?

It is a delight to turn from the nebulous and grandiose to the commonsensical. Says Mr. Vernon:

The soul of Drama does not reside in bricks,

mortar, canvas, and electric light.

Staging is essential to Drama, not Drama to staging; and there is no salvation to Drama, there is damnation in committing the Theatre into the hands of scenic artists and lighting experts.

No scene, however beautiful, ever held an audience's attention for two minutes. One looks, one appreciates, and then asks what it is about.

The Theatre never stood in more urgent need of these sensible recapitulations. Mr. Vernon refers to a recent realistic production in which the scene represented a poor room in Soho. Outside was seen a branch of a tree which, as the wind blew, tapped on the window-pane. Inside, the flame of a fire was supposed to be reflected on the varnished panels of a door. Wind and firelight between them destroyed the dialogue. "I daresay it amused the producer," says Mr. Vernon, "but that is precisely what producers are not for." I am afraid it is going to be ten years before Mr. Basil Dean can quite be trusted with his Schwabe-Hasait installation. Possibly, at the end of that time, we shall be able to look out of a window without incurring meteorological alarums and excursions. Personally, when I submit a modern comedy to this manager I shall see to it that all the scenes take place at midnight with the blinds drawn, and I shall pepper my script with directions that in my play there fall not hail, nor rain, nor any snow, nor ever wind blow loudly.

Mr. Vernon rightly condemns producers whose scenes resemble the window of a furniture shop in the Tottenham Court Road. Less than a month ago I saw a play in which the stage was so littered with furniture that the characters were actually unable to move. Half the stage was taken up by a huge piece of furniture which looked like a grand piano surmounted by an American bar; the other half was occupied by an enormous sofa. The result was that the principal actress, who, on occasion, had sympathetic business near the footlights, could only achieve this by "trying sideways."

Yet there can be little doubt that stage production in this country has made an enormous advance in the last twenty-five years. A quarter of a century ago Mr. Lewis Casson's job as producer would have been confined to seeing that nobody on the stage looked more prominent than Miss Sybil Thorndike. But times are changed; and we have many producers who, like Mr. Casson, see plays steadily and see them whole. On one page only do I part company from Mr. Vernon. He is talking of new waves of writers for the theatre, and declares the dramatic sea to be dried up, with the solitary exception of Mr. Noel Coward. This is plain nonsense. Has Mr. Vernon never heard of Mr. C. K. Munro? If not, it is time he did hear of him, and, what is more, produce him. This little slip apart, I hold Mr. Vernon's book in the highest esteem. It is more than a corrective: it lets all the gas out of Mr. Craig's showy balloon.

Charles Hawtrey and Louis Calvert

HARLES HAWTREY was the most polished player of our time. Acting, with him, was not the expression of emotion, since emotion was not within the range of that precise and ordered intelligence. His art could not well be defined as an expression; it was really the implication of a state of mind which, presented in its simplest, severest form, acquired the beauty of an algebraical formula or a proposition in logic. You might have thought that Hawtrey was not "acting" at all, that he was merely being, and "putting himself upon this stage." Well, this is very largely true; only we must add that this projection was achieved by immensities of calculation and contrivance. The actor relied entirely upon the "silent rhetoric" of well-fitting manners and clothes, sleek hair, and a countenance broad and expressionless as the moon. Lacking not only wealth but variety of accent and gesture, Hawtrey made a virtue of economy. No jeune premier was ever less dependent upon gloves, hat, walking-stick, and cigarette-case. If he moved an arm it was to indicate a shift in the strategical position; if a leg, then a

change of tactics was to be looked for. When Hawtrey crossed a room it was to give a fresh turn to the lying campaign, and when a cigarette was lighted it was to cover some temporary rout.

Hawtrey possessed nothing of the vis comica which makes the spectator laugh without knowing why. You knew very well why you laughed, not at, but with, this actor. Again, it was question of the state of mind. Hawtrey's scapegraces had not the moral force of Wyndham's plausible rogues, who lied only in extremity, and, you felt, would stop lying as soon as they got back to the virtuous path; nor had they any of the deep and tender sensitiveness of James Welch's superficial bounders. Hawtrey's delinquents were neither scapegraces nor cads; they possessed no original grace from which to escape, and they were always well bred. It was said of an old actor that he could never play the gentleman without a slight infusion of the footman; the reverse was the case with Hawtrey. It was almost incredible that the sharpeyed Tidmarshes could mistake Lord Strathpeffer for the man from Blankley's. To this day I remember the vulgarian's remark: "I shouldn't like to tell you how much these cigars cost!" "Of course you wouldn't!" Hawtrey would reply, turning away. This was to raise nonchalance to a fine art, and impertinence to a poem.

Sentiment was never Hawtrey's forte, nor yet romance. The costume-ball in the second act of Lord and Lady Algy seemed to me to fall flat, and so.

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to my way of thinking, did Applejohn's pirate scenes. The actor worked tremendously hard, but it was like a delicate Bordeaux pretending to be a full-bodied Burgundy. That nattily-shod foot was never really at ease anywhere except upon its native hearth-rug.

It is as a portrayer of peccant husbands and wouldbe gallants that this actor will be remembered. By their lies you knew them. Yet Hawtrey-one uses the single name to cover fifty supposedly different personages—never lied out of pure lightness of heart. but rather out of laziness or selfishness. His fibs were smug and furtive, less the occasional embroideries which go with a fling, but rather the steady fabric of persistent and petty self-indulgence. It would be absurd to say that these prevarications did not affront the moral sense. They did, and the whole genius of the actor consisted in reconciling the moral and æsthetic senses. A play like The Liars became, in Wyndham's hands, a "happy breathing-place from the burthen of a perpetual moral questioning"; a play like The Cuckoo became, with Hawtrey, a battle of divorce-court wits. "You're a mighty fine fellow and a magnificent liar," the moralist in us would say, "but if a thousand pounds damages clips your wings, the world won't be the worse off." Whereas none would ever have awarded a farthing against Wyndham's sentimental footpads.

The moral question apart, how delightful the presentment of these highwaymen of the passions! In the vein of perfect insincerity there could be nothing

more brilliant, or more assured. Hawtrey made few visits to the provinces, where he gave one the impression of being supremely out of place. Whenever I saw him on these occasions he had the air of a lost soul, and his acting was such as he might have offered to a horde of naked savages. To this polite citizen London was the world, and the world London, and in his art there was the whole of Town. Like Mr. Kipling's banjo, this acting was all that ever went with evening dress.

Hawtrey, who for forty years was a centre of civilised delight, was immune from all influences and "movements." For him as actor, Ibsen, Shaw, the Russians, and the young school of English writers might never have existed. For him the art of the playhouse stopped short at the Palais Royal of the 'seventies, and if I must find another player who gave the same kind of pleasure I think it would be Baron. But Hawtrey's genius was both English and individual, and there is no need to look for parallels.

Louis Calvert was the last link with the grand tradition of English acting. The third son of those fine players Mr. and Mrs. Charles Calvert, he could trace relationship with the Charles Keans, and was, therefore, by heredity, as well as by temperament, an actor in the most single meaning of the word. As a producer he obtained fame both in this country and in America, and it is to his credit that he did not truckle to the new-fangled, and to the last regarded

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scenery as the background to the player and lighting as the means by which to make him visible.

Calvert was brought up to the sea, and to the end of his life looked a sailor. At an early age he forsook the ocean for that tide of passion which is Shakespeare. What an actor! And what Shakespeare! Calvert was the best Falstaff I ever saw. No need with him of those polite euphemisms about being full in habit. He was splendidly fat, and delighted in it, wallowing to the full in the sense of his perfectly realised ventripotence. There was, as Hazlitt says, cut and come again in Calvert's wealth of jest; "his tongue dropped fatness, and in the chambers of his brain it snowed of meat and drink." A performance in Manchester in the 'nineties of the Second Part of Henry IV. abides with me as the best Shakespearean ensemble that I have ever seen. Laurence Irving was the Shallow to Calvert's Falstaff, and a mascerpiece of dotage hanging on to life as a creaking gate hangs on to its hinge. Mr. Courtenay Thorpe played Prince Hal so affectingly that the spectator, like the actor, was moved to tears.

Then there was Antony. Calvert realised to the full the gross feeder and bluff man of the wars. This was no puling æsthete, but a Colossus undone. The actor roared like a bull of Bashan, now bending his hardly corrigible neck to blows the origin whereof he did not understand, now tossing his head to the storm like some lone leader in an empty plain. His sullens and his stoicism were magnificent, and a match to

Cleopatra's airs. He spoke his part of the opening exchanges not like some world-wearied exquisite, but like a man to whom passion was the serious business of life. Cast in a physical mould which fitted him better for Enobarbus, he could be as romantic as heart desired, and throughout the long speech beginning "Unarm, Eros!" the actor's huge stomach was never in the way. Janet Achurch was the Cleopatra, which she played like Brünhilde. It is curious that these two, sovereignly unfitted though they were in physical ways, could so discard their muddy vestures and give so much of the spirit of this molten, brassy play.

Casca was played by Calvert with that quality which the Germans call humor. I remember him standing by the fountain in Tree's over-elaborate production, the one solid thing in a world of real bricks. Not even a pitiful little play like Daddalums could obscure the shining qualities of this actor. You saw in the unshaven, loose-braced shoemaker with the sagging belly, plentiful traces of the grand tradition. He kept it all so wonderfully to key, and the subdued, yet resonant, "If I had a million knees I'd go down on every one of them," was kin to great utterance. It was the havering of an old pantaloon, but it might so easily have been Lear. Calvert's Caliban was strangely bad. The actor tried to humanise the part, with the result that he looked like some kind-hearted paterfamilias playing bear on the hearth-rug to please the children at a Christmas party. On this occasion the actor was also the producer, and

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Mr. Francis Lister, who played Ferdinand so exquisitely, has generously admitted that much of the beauty of that performance was inspired by the owner of those legs grotesquely stuccoed with jags and tufts of hair like one of Mr. E. T. Reed's prehistoric monsters.

Calvert was not only a fine actor, but the cause whereby fine acting is in others. He wrote a book on the technics of his art which all young players and most old ones would do well to study. He had a cultivated interest in the theatre and produced plays which, at that date, were experiments, Ibsen's Rosmersholm and An Enemy of the People, and Browning's Blot on the 'Scutcheon, which will remain in the tentative category to the end of time. Calvert's performances in Shaw plays do not need recapitulating. He played all the parts which lay within his girth and many which did not. He was large of heart and mind, and in him the theatre loses a big man.

Meggie Albanesi

Mais elle étoit du monde, où les plus belles choses
Ont le pire destin;
Et, rose, elle a vécu ce que vivent les roses,
L'espace d'un matin.

A LL that was mortal of Meggie Albanesi is dead. But though the span of this artist's life was short, attaining to no more than twenty-four years, it sufficed to create for an indomitable spirit an abiding place in our affections and memories.

Perhaps the first thing to be said about Meggie Albanesi is that she had the faculty, vouchsafed to none but the most sensitive artists, of establishing immediate contact with her audience. There was no question of suspending judgment until the piece and the player were well on their way; she had but to speak, and that voice, which vibrated like a harp touched by an exquisite hand, awoke an answering chord in the heart of the listener. Yet it was not a particularly beautiful voice—indeed, I seem to remember that upon occasion a certain hardness used to creep into its accents. Nor was its owner possessed of great physical beauty; she was slight almost to insignificance, the countenance alert and expressive, resembling the "petite frimousse éveillée" which

Sarcey used to describe Réjane in her early days. Yet this little actress had but to appear, and interest centred in her. She might content herself with a corner of the stage: attention would at once be withdrawn from more magnoperative happenings in the middle.

The reason for this, I think, was the intensity and significance of the emotional conflict which raged within the artist. You felt about Albanesi's characters that she had not only thought them out, but fought them out, within her own bosom. She was, so to speak, the first victim of that pity and terror which it is the duty and privilege of the artist to evoke. She presented you, not with a jumble of good and bad to be made the best of according to your discernment, but with a character already purged by the fires within the artist's breast. I have little doubt that Meggie Albanesi felt her parts as much as any player whom I have ever seen. Perhaps more.

This brings us again to the old paradox of the player. It has often been said that if an actor were really to feel Lear he would himself go mad, or die before the end of the performance. This has been held to clinch the argument. Well, there have been actors whose emotion in this part has proved too strong for their physical powers. Von Holtei gives an account of a performance of Lear by Ludwig Devrient at Breslau. "After the second act there was a long wait. At last the stage manager came before the curtain and informed the audience that Devrient had

fallen down in a fit. The audience left quietly. I ran about in the street outside, driven by a deadly fear, keeping my eyes on the door by which the actors went out and in. At last they brought him out, still dressed, in part, in the old king's costume. It was a strange scene. The disordered clothing, the pale face, the bright summer daylight—it was as if they were carrying a dead man from the battlefield."

To Meggie Albanesi the stage was always a battle-field. She felt each and every part as Devrient felt Lear. They tell me that before every performance of A Bill of Divorcement she would shut herself up in her dressing-room and allow none to approach her. It was obvious that she entered very deeply into, and re-created, the agony of Sydney Fairfield in that play; the scene at the end in which the daughter took her father in her arms was one of spiritual anguish on both sides of the curtain. It was here that heart spoke to heart, and tears were shed by the actress which sprang from no well of mere accomplishment and facility.

Did Meggie Albanesi not know that this was to go beyond the prudence of the comedian, that her cheek each night took on increasing pallor? Did she not feel that, with each succeeding performance, the hand to which she bent that pale forehead trembled more and more? Did she not realise the truth in the poet's line:

Et que c'est tenter Dieu d'aimer la douleur?

Yes, we must think that she knew. Too indomitable

a spirit in a body too frail was the tragedy of this young artist. The blade wore out the scabbard. Let me refer readers to Musset's "Stances à la Malibran." There is a great deal in that exquisite poem, written on the premature death of the world-famous singer, which is applicable to our English loss. Like Malibran, Albanesi was a comédienne imprudente in that she denied her art no sacrifice.

How far she was an actress in the more generally accepted sense of that word it is not easy to say. The Lilies of the Field was almost the only piece in which I saw her make a definite attempt at impersonation. In this she showed considerable sense of both comedy and malice. In all her other parts she seemed to me to remould the character after her own fashion, to represent it in the guise of her proper personality. Even in East of Suez she forced her essential rightness and singleness of purpose to shine through. Could Meggie Albanesi have portrayed a vicious or a despicable character, or even a woman mean of soul? I think not. She would have hammered some spark of nobility out of her material, however unpromising.

It would be unwise to claim for Meggie Albanesi that she was a great actress. She was not. She attempted neither Shakespeare, nor, with one exception, old English comedy. Apparently of the mettle to try a fall with Ibsen and Tchehov, she refrained. None saw her as Nora, Hedwig, Hedda, or Hilda. She avoided the pyrotechnics of Pinero and Sudermann. Shaw did not tempt her. She was content

to play, or rather to be, the best type of young English womanhood of our day. East of Suez showed that she lacked power on the grand scale. In its place she had extraordinary nervous intensity. Perhaps we may say that her range was small, but that within that range she was a complete and perfect artist. It is idle to speculate upon what she might have accomplished. Let us reflect once more that out of the artist who means execution there goes a spirit which outlives the most untimely ending. Meggie Albanesi is dead, and her art is become an enduring fragrance, enshrined, I venture to think, in the famous verse of Malherbe which stands at the head of this appreciation.

English and Foreign Artists

IF a country cousin should demand to know by return of post card which artists are best worth seeing in London at the present time, it is obvious that I must answer Duse and the Guitrys. But I should reply by letter, and take up the full postal weight in explaining that richness of talent abroad does not necessarily mean poverty at home.

The wind of genius bloweth when and where it listeth. For sixty years, throughout Bernhardt's working life, it blew a full gale in France. In Italy it has sighed and sobbed in the noble branches of that tree of sorrow—Eleonora Duse. In England, the breeze bore us Irving—a player to be ranked, in my opinion, with those others. And this despite his faults, of which, in way of dissonance and crabbed uncouthness, he would commit more in one night than Sarah in ten years and Duse in a lifetime.

Yet that Irving had genius is beyond dispute. You knew it as soon as you clapped eyes on him, and thought no more of questioning it than you would argue, as Hazlitt said, about a leg of mutton.

The last half-century has seen this country rich in

actresses whose brilliant talents have brought them to the very verge of genius. Of three of them, indeed, one might say that they had at least a foot in that incalculable territory. Duse's visit has brought us many references to the actress who must always be dearest to the English heart—Ellen Terry. Yet none was ever less like Duse than our Shakespearean darling—English in her April gift of laughter and those tears which, for all their pathos, came from no deep well.

There hangs in the *foyer* at the Lyceum the loveliest of remembrancers—a picture of Ellen in the rôle of Imogen. Her pose is that of "Joy, whose hand is ever at his lip, bidding adieu," and whenever I see it I reflect that, for our happiness, Joy never carried out his threat. Ellen Terry put a very tentative hand to the pall of tragedy, and as quickly withdrew it.

There have been surprisingly few comparisons between the art of the great Italian tragedienne and that of a great English actress who has an abiding place in all our memories—Mrs. Kendal. On her rare occasions of escape from skeins of domestic entanglement as little perilous as Berlin wool she showed how deep was her knowledge of terror and pity. Duse has not exceeded the pathos of this actress in The Likeness of the Night, conveyed austerely with English parsimony of accent and gesture. And, to be perfectly frank, I do not think that the Italian actress has ever equalled the tragic dominance of the English-

English and Foreign Artists

woman in that last act. Then there is Mrs. Patrick Campbell, whose Mariana in Echegaray's play of the same name haunted me for years with its beauty of line and tone, and liquid, almost Italian, grace. Not Duse was more lovely than this actress in her earlier years. Mrs. Campbell could then attain to Poe's—

Something about Satan's dart, Something about angels' wings, Much about a broken heart, All about unhappy things.

She was the "valley of unrest" indeed.

But what of to-day? the reader may ask. Irving is gone; two of my three great actresses have become memories; Mrs. Campbell, that once steady star, has taken to gadding about the firmament like a comet of uncertain periodicity. In plain English, she plays too seldom. It is true that we have not a Duse; but then we must not expect to have one. I remember once asking an old German music-master whether Rachmaninoff had composed anything else besides that infamous prelude. He spread his hands and replied: "No, vy should he?" (He was wrong, but no matter.) Genius is sporadic, and its presence gives no indication as to the general health of an art. In the way of intelligence we have Miss Edith Evans, whose little finger is thicker in wit than the bodies of some whole companies, Miss Thorndike, who has looked greatness in the face and will stare at the sun again, and the finest collection of talented young actors that the English stage has known within my

recollection. I do not remember a time when, despite the superficial ripple of the West End, the undercurrent of serious interest in the theatre was so strong as it is to-day. We must be more than grateful to Mr. Cochran, whose eager enterprise has resulted in the visits of great foreign artists.

But I do not want us to lose sight of this-that we must be equally grateful to Mr. Mulholland, who has brought to Hammersmith one of the best Shakespearean companies London has ever seen. After all, the art of acting in England is in the hands of English players, and it is by these only that it can be kept alive. Duse is the greatest living actress; her art, to the few who have the luck to witness it, brings whole bushels of beauty. But I am not prepared to say that her visit is as vital to our stage as that of the Stratfordon-Avon company; or that one single performance of Ghosts, however glorious, and before a company however distinguished, is as significant as the presentment of this play, throughout a whole week, at the Pavilion Theatre, Whitechapel, before an East End audience.

Eleonora Duse



Eleonora Duse

"The Lady from the Sea." By IBSEN. New Oxford Theatre
"Ghosts." By IBSEN. New Oxford Theatre

ELL me not in mournful numbers that Ellida Wangel is a young woman and Duse an old. There is no age for those whose art is of the spirit. challenging Time. Duse asks for no quarter; and if there are allowances to be made it is she and not we who must make them. To have no more Italian than suffices to cope with a prima donna is an obvious handicap; hot from the text, I still could not be quite sure where, exactly, the actors were. Yet the bigger the play and the player, the less the disadvantage. You may not catch the drift of Arnholm's "He explained his circumstances to me clearly," but it doesn't matter. The fellow is lying anyhow; nobody in this play ever really explains anything, in spite of a habit of exposition which amounts almost to mania.

Ibsen plunges at once into the middle of his favourite mess—a second marriage. What a lot they are! The elder daughter by the first marriage accepts her former tutor whom she does not love, rather than that

life should pass her by; the younger wants to be engaged to a consumptive artist for the sheer fascination of wearing mourning, "all black, up to the throat." Queer fish? You may well say that! as Ibsen's people are always remarking. Ellida herself, in cold print, is as mad as a hatter. Before her marriage she was "promised" to a seafaring man, who besides being a murderer has the power to haunt a woman and to give her husband's child fishlike eyes. Ellida is virtually an amphibian, and divides her waking hours between her bathing-van and the sea. Is the Stranger's power hypnotic, mystical, occult? We never know. As usual, Ibsen builds his play like a house of two storeys. Above stairs, where symbolism reigns, everything is as clear as day; down below, where the characters are actually living and taking meals, all is dark and you bark your shins horribly. These people are mad on the ground-floor only.

This play is a godsend to a great artist whose forte is not so much doing as suffering that which Fate has done to her. With Duse, speech is silver and silence golden. It is not so much that she "acts" when she is silent, as that your mind has leisure to take in the accumulated wealth of all that has been said with voice and face and hands. The voice seemed to me to be just as exquisite as ever; the arms, with their grave dance, eked out the old insufficiency of words; the face, in moments of emotion, lit up from within as though a lime had been thrown upon it. There was

the old, ineffable grace, the childish importunacy, the raising of human dignity to a power undreamt of. The long second act was a symphony for the voice, but to me the scene of greatest marvel was the third act. In this Duse scaled incredible heights. There was one moment when, drawn by every fibre of her being to the unknown irresistible of the Stranger and the sea, she blotted herself behind her husband and took comfort and courage from his hand.

Here terror and ecstasy sweep over her face with that curious effect which this actress alone knowsas though this were not present stress, but havoc remembered of past time. Her features have the placidity of long grief; so many storms have broken over them that nothing can disturb again this sea of calm distress. If there be in acting such a thing as pure passion divorced from the body yet expressed in terms of the body, it is here. Now and again in this strange play Duse would seem to pass beyond our ken, and where she has been there is only a fragrance and a sound in our ears like water flowing under the stars. The end of the play sees her definitely on earth again, reinforcing the old man's moral that freedom means responsibility. Wangel gives Ellida her choice, and she renounces the sea.

I thought all the acting excellent, particularly the Doctor Wangel and the Lyngstrand. To the eye the young girls looked more like startled fawns or *ingénues* from Meilhac and Halévy than Ibsen's scarifying

young women; but the fault, I am sure, lay in my insufficient apprehension of what they were saying. There was not the smallest pretence that anybody was Norwegian; Como was stamped over them all. They are a rum lot, these Northerners. One found oneself wishing now and again that the Wangels would do as Mrs. Crupp advised, and "take to skittles, which is healthy, and so divert the mind."

The history of Ibsen's Ghosts should prove that whatever else may be wrong, conservatism cannot possibly be right. Some twenty or twenty-five years ago the keepers of our playgoing consciences decreed that if we in Manchester were so perverse as to want to abet the Norwegian's attack upon morality and the purity of the home, we must confine our eccentricity to a concert hall and pretend to be the actors' guests. Well, we did so pretend. Who that was present at that great assault upon his conscience by Janet Achurch and Mr. Courtenay Thorpe could have believed it possible that in his lifetime this "odious" play would be chosen by the most distinguished living actress for presentation before a fashionable West End audience, and at the same time fill the bill in a people's theatre in the East End? Surely conservatism would be hard pressed-to explain this transition from the scandalous to the exemplary! I have not seen the production at the Pavilion Theatre. Whitechapel. A dramatic critic's lot is not too happy as it is; to submit twice in one week to so emotional a gruelling is to take an exorbitant view of one's duties.

Ghosts is one of the most complicated of the Ibsen dramas. It bristles with challenge, provoking one to ask the old impertinent "What does it mean?" Impatiently one brushes aside the old inhibition against what has always been, after all, a very natural question. The whole bite of tragedy is the warning lest by like folly the spectator bring about like disaster. But what warning can teach the spectator's father to have behaved himself? And if the play be no more than a warning to the onlooker to see to his hygienic p's and q's, is it distinguishable from a tract? Surely there's more here than that? Why should all the characters so persistently hymn the song of living, if the upshot of the whole thing is repression?

There are some uprooting things in the play. When Mrs. Alving warns Regina that she is going to her ruin, the girl replies, "Oh, stuff! Goodbye." And you know that she is going to work out her own destiny, and incidentally do very well for herself. The play is hemmed in with ideas as precipitous as the mountains sloping to the fiord, and one wonders whether, in the same way that the melancholy of the Irish may be traced to their soil, so these Norwegian aspirations may not be a reflection in the mind of natural escarpments. As that awful night wears on, so the tragedy thickens to complete

hopelessness. Dawn comes, and we see the sun rise over the distant hills. There is something baleful and uncannily significant in the actual presence of that red disc. Oswald asks for it to be given him, and repeats tonelessly, "The sun, the sun." There is more here than a pretty touch in madness. But what?

Eleonora Duse presents Mrs. Alving as though that character were a ghost hallowed by memory and time. This weeping, tender lady, bending over Oswald like some sad willow, is not the woman whom Ibsen drew, gazing speechless upon her stricken son and twining her hands among horrific hairs. This exquisite creature, moving from grief to grief in some grey saraband of woe, was not Ibsen's still rebellious woman, whose egotism, hardly baulked. breaks out again in bitter mockery of Pastor Manders. There is a moment when Mrs. Alving recognises that the root of the tragedy is in herself, in a joylessness so austere that her husband was fain to pass his life between lying at home on the sofa reading an old Court Guide, and the lowest dissipation. It needs a woman of big bone to stand up to such a slap in the face as Ibsen here administers; he could not have offended Duse so. When the fire breaks out, the Pastor has some sententious nonsense about a "judgment upon this house of sin." "Yes, of course," replies Mrs. Alving with withering scorn. The man is such a fool that he cannot be argued with. Duse delivered this as though it were a benediction. Her performance was instinct with resignation, whereas Ibsen's character battled it to the end.

And in the beginning, too. One could not help feeling that this Mrs. Alving was as little-likely to have read those books which so shocked the Pastor as Manders himself. It was incredible that she could ever have clinked glasses with her drunken husband. She blames her "cowardice" that she has not openly encouraged her son to marry his half-sister. Duse utters the words, but we do not believe that she would have given the thought entrance to her mind. As well credit ribaldry in the mouth of a Madonna. Far truer, in my opinion, was the Mrs. Alving of Janet Achurch. This was Ibsen's heroine, a mountain of fierce egotism, of warped, twisted self-assertiveness. Janet was ungainly, and had none of Duse's exquisiteness. To see the Italian actress move, draped as she always is like a queen, is a whole folio in ecstasy, her play of hands about face and robe a revelation. Janet waddled; she hitched and thrust at her dress like a washerwoman; she was impatient of every kind of beauty. Yet she was alive, human, and warm, full of mockery, of revolt, and at the end, of horror. Ibsen meant the end of this play to be horrible, and would have resented any refining into Aristotelian suavity. He meant to shock, and to shock prosaically and provincially. The tragedy takes place in a little country town as borné as Balham; that this is dumped down by the side of a fiord makes no difference.

Janet Achurch sailed no blue and gold apartment,

the doors of which would have fitted a palace; you could not have carved her tenderness upon a frieze as you could Duse's; she did not soothe you into accepting grief as a part of human heritage to be expressed in beauty. She brought you face to face with unendurable shock.

Signor Memo Benassi gave this impression of the purely unbearable. True that he did not present a pathological study of the same fidelity as Mr. Courtenay Thorpe's; there was no growing terror, since no more obviously healthy young man ever stepped. Signor Benassi strode the stage like Mr. Cyril Tolley after a 69 at St. Andrews. But when the first of his two great outbursts came, what a flood it was! Great and noble artist that she is, Duse gave the young actor the whole stage and effaced herself completely. There is no mawkish reticence about an Italian player in an agony, and the young man compelled at least one spectator to quite as many tears as he cares about. It was a relief to hear some one make a noise. If only Duse would break that deadly, still monotony, even at the cost of something harsh and ugly! Lowness of tone is not the whole of acting.

I do not want to be misunderstood. Duse is a very great artist who, nevertheless, gives one the impression of scorning to be an actress. She has nothing of what the Germans call humor, and only the aftermath of passion. One feels that she would play Lady Macbeth like a wounded dove. She is always herself, her fastidious, beautiful self. So, you

Eleonora Duse

say, was Bernhardt. But Bernhardt had a hundred different ways of being the same person. She could shake Heaven and Hell; Duse breathes only a sigh. Sarah, in the mind, still flames and glows; Duse lingers like some exquisite, faint regret.

June 10 and 17.



The Elizabethan Drama



"'Tis Pity she's a Whore"

By JOHN FORD

THE PHŒNIX SOCIETY

ANTIQUARIAN interest, on the stage, is all fudge; a play which is dead is dead. No amount of artificial respiration will restore that peculiar protégé of the Phœnix, John Dryden, dead as a door-nail, Tutankh-Amen, or whatever symbol we may elect for one who, whatever he may be in the study, on the stage is no longer alive; no change in dramatic fashion can kill John Ford, the last of the tragic Elizabethans. I do not think that there was a single member of the cultured audience who did not follow this story of a brother's and sister's love with at least as lively a degree of interest as if it had been unrolled before them on the drawing-room stage, the screen, or among the faits divers of the sensation-mongering press. Add to the exciting and grievous tale the last wash and surge of the greatest tide in English poetry, half a dozen pieces of fine acting and one that touched greatness, and there was reason why the

spectator of to-day should have been swept off his feet.

The play has long been a thorn in the critical side. Even so determined a judge as Hazlitt could never quite make up his mind about it. He suspects in one place that the "exceptionableness" of the subject constitutes the play's chief merit; in another that it will "no more bear acting than Lord Byron and Goethe together could have written it." In this matter of exceptionableness Hazlitt is wrong; perhaps he was only making obeisance to the squeamishness of the time. It is become a commonplace of criticism that defilement is not in the pitch but in him who touches it; and we may find significance in the fact that it is to God, through His representative, the Friar, that Giovanni first unburdens his soul. We see nothing of the storm and stress which have preceded confession; the unlawful passion is declared, absolute and inevitable, beyond human resistance. Everything here depends upon the actor who plays Giovanni: he must strike the note of one who is now on the other side of passion, steeped in so far that not only "returning were as tedious as go o'er," but inconceivable. Mr. Ion Swinley was exactly right here. This bosom, one felt, was surcharged with self-blame, and therefore unassailable by alien pre-"What is, is," says Giovanni in the words of the unexceptionable Mr. Locke, caring no fig whether our Tupperish masters of the want of human understanding should declare the contents of that

"'Tis Pity she's a Whore"

bosom to be for the best or the worst. Nor, we may suppose, did Ford very greatly care. He, like Tourneur, was permeated with the spirit and morals of the Italian Renaissance. They took their plots where they found them, and went ahead with dramas of incest, rape, parricide and matricide, as though these things could really happen-which the reader of the modern Sunday newspaper may concede that in mediæval Italy they did. Ford was a poor moralist in the Puritan sense, and his sop to morality, in the form of Annabella's repentance, lacks conviction. The play remains, as an acted story, one of the greatest interest and power, over which the dramatist has thrown such a mantle of poetry that the mawkish may, if it please them, forget the matter and take cover in the manner. It may be said that the flame of the poet's genius burns so brightly as to consume, and purify, the candle.

Yet there is much in respect of which the play is intolerable to modern sense. One would instance the killing of Bergetto. It may be that the baiting of innocents was legitimate in Ford's day, and that the very humanity and sympathy of Mr. Harold Scott's playing were wrong. The actor was extraordinarily funny, showed the soul of the wander-wit to be most ludicrously loose about him, and yet established so great a degree of likeableness that it was unbearable to see him dispatched. The putting out of the Nurse's eyes is not to modern taste. Then there is the, to modern notions, quite extraordinary lack of

irony. Soranzo piles invective upon invective as a composer heaps up his tonal power, and develops his whole jealous symphony to a climax of vitriolic paranoia.

Must your hot itch and plurisy of lust,
The heyday of your luxury, be fed
Up to a surfeit, and could none but I
Be picked out, to be cloak to your close tricks,
Your belly sports? Now I must be the dad
To all that gallimaufry that is stuffed
In thy corrupted bastard-bearing womb!
Say, must I?

He does not see that as he is cuckolded so has he wronged Richardetto. But possibly the principle of not doing to others as you would not be done by had not made much headway in the seventeenth century. There was some admirable acting by Mr. Michael Sherbrooke, who endowed Vasques with a passion Jewish rather than Spanish, and by Miss Barbara Gott, who played the Nurse like a Rembrandt come to life. I find it difficult to say much of Miss Moyna Macgill's Annabella, which was pretty and insignificant where it should have been, oh, ever so much more. Mr. Ion Swinley's performance was quite perfect. Here is an actor in a fair way to become a tragedian; that is, if the managers will permit him. He has looks, figure, voice, admirable command of gesture and phrasing, pathos and variety in nobility. When he withdrew the dagger from Annabella's womb he did not discard it as a piece of useless furniture, but rather identified himself with

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it. He became, as it were, all dagger. His attitudes throughout the last scene were very fine indeed, and recalled those pictures of old actors who, by taking thought, would seem to have added a cubit and more to their stature.

February 3.

"Richard III."

By WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

THE "OLD VIC."

THE first thing to be remarked about the Shakespearean performances at the "Old Vic." is the quality of the audience. This, you feel, is no assemblage idly "doing" a theatre, but a crowd of busy men and women determined to lay out leisure to good purpose. Your right-hand neighbour has put up his master's shutters and hardly gulped his tea; the fellow on your left is a railway goods porter, on duty at midnight. Such fellows will drink in a performance lasting four hours as greedily as sweating haymakers their ale. The recent production of Richard III. was a generous draught of best English brew—they poured out nearly the whole barrel yet one wanted more. One felt that Shakespeare had tired of these Yorkists and Lancastrians, and skimped his ending.

What, we wanted to know, became of Catesby, who stuck to Richard to the end and would have helped him to a horse? "There is no creature loves me," wailed Gloster, lying to the last; for Catesby, of a surety, loved him. The point is a small one, yet it

marks Shakespeare's extraordinary power of creating men and women. Richard is flesh and blood; he leaves innumerable corpses in his wake, and remains credible. Think what an unbelievable welter Ford or Webster would have made! Whereas Richard was as actual to this audience as any murderer of the penny press. Only a little more sophistication was necessary to make these simple playgoers realise that great tragic embodiments are more "real" than reality, more lifelike than life. For myself, I am childishly illuded by Richard, who seems to me to be dotted all over history. I do not conceive him as essentially different from Napoleon, or-pace Mr. Drinkwater-Cromwell, or even our modern newspaper-lords. He physically, these morally, were given shoulders "ordain'd so thick to heave." When it was the fashion their owners cut the heads off living men; to-day they cut the head off living truth, and it suffices. To have told that Waterloo Road audience that Richard was a figure of pure melodrama would, if they had understood what was meant, have been accounted the purest treason. We all knew Richard intimately and took to him, as we have taken to many another scoundrel, for his pluck. This did not prevent us from cheering his conqueror for his manly sentiments, well uttered without priggishness by Mr. Wilfrid Walter. By a happy imaginative touch, the lord who, at the end, offered Richmond the crown, bent his head as he did so towards the dead body of Richard. "You lost," that

gesture seemed to say, "but you were the bigger man!" It was an inspired coda.

Twice the orchestra let me down badly—once, when it accompanied the din of battle with trivialities destructive of tension, and earlier by hardly preluding at all. Relying upon those interminable "Henry VIII. Dances," which, in the English theatre, usher in no matter what reign, I arrived some five minutes late, to find the curtain up and Lady Anne bidding the undertakers set down their honourable load, etc.; etc. I gathered, from the fact that "virtuous Lancaster" figured in the programme among the live actors, that the play had begun where it ought always to begin, with the murder of Henry VI., which has rounded off the previous "episode" in this drama of strong "domestic interest." "Begin to-day!" is all very well in a newspaper, or on the screen; without a synopsis of previous happenings this play is almost impossible to follow in the theatre. Even the connecting link will not always make matters clear to simple minds. For a time I stood at the back of the pit and was rewarded by an illuminating colloquy. "Who's the bloke in the coffin?" one said. "Dunno," replied another. Then, more hopefully: "Unless it's 'Enery, 'im wot got done in." Let me confess that I, too, had but a vague recollection who the bloke was, and who the women. They take a deal of sorting out. Anne is a fool, and Queen Margaret and Queen Elizabeth are the most triumphant bores in Shakespeare. Add the Duchess of York, and we get a quartet of she-ravens which would have croaked any but the most magnificent play into its grave. Was it, I wonder, necessary for all these royalties and semi-royalties to look so unutterably dowdy and dilapidated? Queen Margaret might have been doubling the part of First Witch at a theatre over the way, while the Duchess of York wore the air of a widow who had spent her life brooding in the baywindow of a villa overlooking the cemetery at Kensal Green. These were relicts, but not distinguished relicts. I have known landladies who resembled them.

But the play stands or falls by Richard. It was the first time I had seen Mr. Robert Atkins, and he disconcerted me for a while with a mask for Gloster reminiscent of so many others that it seemed hardly Gloster's own. There was something of Napoleon, of every actor's Cromwell; something too of that tragic eye which Lauder can cock at you so surprisingly. Mr. Atkins endowed Richard with a smooth champaign countenance in no way horrific and on the whole pleasing, as became the man who took in Hastings and won Anne. But such a presentation has this disadvantage, that, unlike Kean's, it is emphatically not one for Titian to paint. It is bourgeois. The actor did not make Anne's winning plausible, but then it is unthinkable that actor ever did. Mr. Atkins realised from the start that he had a long way to go and did not force the pace. Indeed, his first act was unimpressive, save for a walk which had in it

the lilt of the moral buccaneer. Later his cunning and quiet ferocity took on cumulative effect, and I cannot imagine that the scenes with Hastings and Buckingham could be better played. But Richard's distinguishing traits are not these, nor yet cruelty nor temporal ambition, but mental arrogance. He knew himself the biggest man in the kingdom, and deposed the others by right of brain. I must think Mr. Atkins wrong in playing him throughout like an upstart, a "little corporal" instead of a princely usurper born in an eyrie "in the cedar's top." Richard is fulfilled, not diminished, by his crimes; and this hardly appeared. Here the actor's mentality was scarcely to blame; no player can go beyond his personality. Mr. Atkins, in short, made a Napoleon of Richard and did not allow us to forget the Corsican: he had all the nudgings and pawings, the ill-bred bonhomie of that adventurer. It is something to get through such a part with even a semblance of conviction; but from that to the sublime is more than a step. We are told that Kean was best in the last scene of all, that he fought like one "drunk with wounds"; that after his sword was wrested from him he stood with his hands stretched out in an attitude of preternatural and terrific grandeur, as though his will could not be disarmed. Well, that is all a long time ago, and perhaps it was Hażlitt and not Kean who was as great as all that. Mr. Atkins certainly wasn't. though his performance was a fine one.

The scenery was admirable throughout, by which I

" Richard III."

mean that it was almost non-existent. A few bits of cardboard covered with brown paper made up a battlement; some bigger bits, aided by good lighting. did for Richard's tent; the whole so imaginatively composed that it never got in the actor's way or stood between you and the play. I doubt whether this mounting cost a five pound note; I am certain that no production has ever given me greater pleasure. Perhaps their Graces of York and Ely need not have had quite such dirty hands. A Shakespeare play, on the West End stage, is generally presented as something intolerable, a thing of decay to be made decent by trappings and plumes. "Who's the bloke in the coffin?" we ask, meaning Shakespeare. At the "Old Vic." both play and spectators are alive; one feels that the poet is speaking still, and to his proper kin.

March 10.

"Cymbeline"

By WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

NEW THEATRE

In a little speech at the fall of the curtain, Miss Thorndike alluded to the anxiety natural to the West End manager who ventures upon a play by Shakespeare. But Cymbeline, long recognised as verging upon the unproducible half-dozen—pace the undismayed "Old Vic."—must always give rise to trepidation. It is a poor play, and shows the writer as a tired man whose hand appears on many pages, but whose total gesture we miss.

If this play be Shakespeare and nobody else, then one imagines either that he was fulfilling a contract, or that he was temporarily written out. Or perhaps the poet had grown contemptuous of his public, and threw them something which he did not even take the trouble to perfect. One makes these surmises with diffidence. Consider that this play was probably preceded by The Winter's Tale and followed by The Tempest, two masterpieces which show that the four great tragedies together with the three other plays which belong to this period, Troilus, Timon, and Measure for Measure, had not entirely exhausted their

author's powers. Yet Cymbeline is strangely inferior to all these. Is it possible that Shakespeare was, for the last time, merely tinkering up another man's play, sewing his brilliant trimmings on to the garment of an inferior tailor who, like his master, had dipped for material in the common rag-bag of dramatic motive, but pulled less magically out?

And to put together the patchwork Cymbeline there was need neither of Holinshed nor of Boccaccio. A competent hack could have done it out of the odds and ends of Shakespeare's other plays. It is quite consonant with the theory of an "arranger" that he should give his résumé at least the air of a new play. What better than a device which has always been, and always will be, to the hand of the dramatist, though Shakespeare does not seem to have been fond of it? Thus we get the "wager" motive which, centuries later, Dumas fils and Sydney Grundy thought such a capital idea. Complicate this with the "jealousy" motive, with which, only yesterday, Mr. Matheson Lang was making carnival. (I hasten to agree that gambling and jealousy are elemental passions.) Add all that mechanical business from Romeo and Juliet, concerning posions which are no poisons, the changeling-cumfoundling motive from The Winter's Tale, the masquerading from As You Like It. Enliven with alarums and excursions, and prick out with patriotism. And just as the Queen's boast about the "natural bravery of this isle," about "Neptune's park" and all the rest of it is inferior to John of Gaunt's "other Eden, demi-

paradise," so Posthumus is inferior to Othello, and Iachimo is less than Iago. Imogen, too, is a poor pastiche. She has less wit than Rosalind, less gumption than Desdemona, less resolution than Juliet. Would that last determined lady have prepared to follow Lucius with no more than a tear and a sigh, a beggarly two hundred prayers, and a sentimental smoothing of the earth over her dead lover?

Even when Shakespeare obviously displays his hand he shows something less than his usual skill.

Damn'd Pisanio
Hath with his forged letters—damn'd Pisanio—
From this most bravest vessel of the world
Struck the main-top!

reads like the poet who could make Othello talk of the butt and sea-mark of his utmost sail. But what are we to think of the succeeding:

O Posthumus! Alas, Where is thy head? Where's that? Ay, me! where's that?

Did, when the master was in form, such ten low words e'er creep in one dull line? Even those two lyrics lose something of exquisiteness when you hear them in their context. "Hark, hark! the lark" should not have been sung by order of a Cloten to a disdainful lady. Even that soul-shattering line, "To thee the reed is as the oak" loses significance when it is rehearsed over the body of one who will presently awake.

Mr. Casson's version gives the play the best of chances. He divides it into two acts, and by the use

of curtains and an inner stage secures a continuity of narration and an appearance of cohesion. This noman's-land in time and space is admirable; the costumes are of an arbitrary period, and "Britain" is anywhere you like. Once Posthumus delivered a speech in a blue and yellow cloak against a blue curtain with admirable effect. Mr. Charles Carson was not the only actor who was indistinct. Otherwise his Posthumus was a performance of admirably blended vigour and restraint. Mr. Robert Farquharson lacked only a horse for his Iachimo to look like the statue of Caligula in the entrance hall of the British Museum. The bravery of his address and bearing was that of a Florentine noble from the pages of Benvenuto Cellini. I heard one lady call this Iachimo "rather a dear," though whether lovableness is the function of this character I beg leave to doubt. Still, I thought Mr. Farquharson gave a performance of both brains and beauty, and one almost entirely free from tricks of distortion and grimace. The long scene in the bedchamber was very imaginatively and decoratively done. After all, one must not expect a Florentine noble to cut as stolid and unromantic a figure as a policeman or a commissionaire at a cinema; and if the actor attitudinised a little, so perhaps did the exquisites of Florence in the sixteenth century. For Iachimo is pure Renaissance even if Shakespeare makes him hob-nob with rude Britons of the time of Boadicea.

About Miss Thorndike's Imogen I am frankly in a difficulty. I have never been able to "see" this fine

and magnoperative artist in parts where a fragility of intellect must be suggested. Sybil can make 2 voracious meal of a Medea, mauling her like a lioness, and the spectacle is magnificent. But you cannot worry the virtue out of Imogen. Of course, her interpreter knows all there is to be known about this faint lily, and would probably lecture about her most illuminatively. But to analyse and to be are two different things, and nervous modernity is not Imogen's "note." Miss Thorndike gives me the impression of having swallowed the character at one gulp, and of looking round the stage for something about which to be effective. Hence those little cheerfulnesses and playfulnesses, and those stupendous exits with the left arm extended in swan-like exploration. Miss Margaret Yarde licked the Queen's platter clean, and enjoyed herself enormously. Mr. Ian Fleming and Mr. Lewis Casson were good as the Barrie-ish Britons. Mr. Willie Clarkson had a great success. His shop would seem to contain all manner of beards, save those of moderate length.

September 19.

"Love's Labour's Lost"

By WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

THE "OLD VIC."

It is Miss Lilian Baylis's proud distinction that the theatre of which she is lessee and manager belongs to her only in the sense in which a country belongs to its king. We are Miss Baylis's loving subjects; but her theatre belongs to us by right of Shakespeare. It is our playhouse, and these are our actors. Neither on a first nor on any other night do we make up such an audience as the critical schoolmaster in this play might call "too picked, too spruce, too affected, too odd, as it were, too peregrinate." Some of us are not travelled, and know little of the West End theatre. We are just plain people who want our Shakespeare without frills, and know where to find it.

Of Love's Labour's Lost Hazlitt pronounces that if we were to part with any of the comedies it should be this. He is probably speaking from his reading only; I can find no record of his having seen the play on the stage. Comparing this earliest of the comedies, as given at the "Old Vic.," with Cymbeline, as performed at the New Theatre, I, personally, would prefer

to discard the later play. But perhaps Hazlitt would have called Cymbeline a History. One would not set up "When daisies pied and violets blue" against "Fear no more the heat o' the sun," for the reason that to attempt to prove the excellence of any Shakespearean play by its lyrics would be to resemble the pedant who, when he offered his house for sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen. The lyrics are not integral to the Shakespearean fabric; say, rather, bits of stained glass from hall and staircase. And if neither play is a palace, it can at least be said of the early piece that it is not the mud-hovel of Cymbeline prettified by a master-decorator. Love's Labour's Lost is a pleasant retreat, an arbour set in a garden of playful fancy. A Watteau, to change the figure, of charm and that significance in ordered beauty which unity alone can give, rather than a sprawling cartoon with one ear and one hand by the master, and the rest by a pupil of no particular talent.

It is this unity which so offended Hazlitt, because he found it a unity of tedium. It is the modern fashion to look round for excuses on this play's behalf, to postulate for it a certain "revue-interest" in the days when John Lyly aired his fantastical style, and Italian grandees and Russian nobles walked our streets, all apt for mockery. But literary piety is a poor reason for visiting the theatre, and if Love's Labour's Lost were really dull, I should not recommend anybody to go to see it on account of its historical interest, nor yet because its production is the penultimate lap in the

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"Old Vic's." really tremendous feat of producing the whole of Shakespeare.

In this production the eye is pleasantly rested, the ear is enchanted, and now and again a line will roll and break upon a familiar shore, and remind the hearer of the tide which was just beginning to flow. Surely we must know the surge of poetry's incoming sea in some such passage as:

For valour, is not Love a Hercules, Still climbing trees in the Hesperides? Subtle as Sphinx; as sweet and musical As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair; And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods Makes heaven drowsy with the harmony.

Mr. Ion Swinley delivered these lines with great beauty, and spoke the whole of his long part "with good accent and good discretion," as a Nestor of criticism once remarked. Mr. Swinley is probably the best romantic actor in England to-day. He knows that to put on grace it is not necessary to put off virility, and his admirable and poetic diction is well matched by his mastery of gesture. Everybody who saw this actor's Giovanni in Ford's play will realise that the "Old Vic." has made a great acquisition. The Don Adriano of Mr. George Hayes contained an almost feline quality of felicity. The actor made sleek little dabs at all the fun in his part, and must have amused even those who had never heard of Euphues. Excellent, too, was Mr. Walter's Holofernes. There is not much, perhaps, to be done with the rest of the

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précieux ridicules. Those deflators of preciosity, the ladies, were good; and Miss Florence Saunders lived up to the line which enjoins that she shall have "a velvet brow, with two pitch-balls stuck in her face for eyes."

But the great performance of the evening was Mr. Hay Petrie's Costard. There was no mere antiquarian interest here. Costard breathed the very spirit of the numskulls of Elizabethan England, yet he contrived to be as amusing, and amusing in as modern a way as, say, Mr. Bert Coote in revue. As Pompion the Great in the masquerade he was singularly like Mr. Billy Merson in Roman toils. Withal he had that quality which alone your truly great comedian possesses—the suggestion, beneath lunatic disguise, of the descent from God. Costard was an innocent. He would stare at a gallant or a great lady as at some thing outside and beyond his mental reach. For some time yet his brain would remain a dark, unlighted chamber, and then, as Lamb says of Dodd, you would see the first dawn of apprehension steal slowly over his countenance—a painful process resulting at the end in no more than a twilight conception.

Then the poor fellow would tire, and let his attention wander—though his gaze remained fixed—and withdraw into a mood for which "contemplative" is too significant a word. He would ruminate, and come back to this world with a start. Yet despite the vacant eye and the mind elsewhere you felt that the fellow had a soul. He was lovable, and you knew

"Love's Labour's Lost"

that to his creation the actor had put the same kind of passion that Lauder expends upon Doughie the Baker. Mr. Petrie does not imitate any other actor, and these comparisons are not meant to be more than finger-posts in the direction of his kind of excellence. Let me say that this Costard is one of the greatest pieces of comic acting that I have ever seen. It is all in one piece, and human.

September 30.

"Troilus and Cressida"

By WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

THE "OLD VIC."

THE First Folio Tercentenary celebrations have come and gone, and on Wednesday last at the "Old Vic." all things proper to the occasion were said and done. Heminge and Condell, those neversufficiently-to-be-praised Editors, were not forgotten; but one felt that the evening belonged to Miss Baylis. There is something which convention calls masculine in the mere contemplation of so stupendous a job as the production on a single stage, and under a thousand disabilities, of the thirty-seven plays. This is a task, one might have rudely hazarded, to stagger one of the weaker sex.

But Miss Baylis is no male-mouthing Atlas making great play with her world only to drop it when the burden should become inconveniently heavy. She has shown that quiet persistence and noiseless courage which are the concomitants to feminine valour. It may even be that in 1914 Miss Baylis did not foresee her ultimate achievement. L'appétit vient en mangeant, and perhaps both the taste and capacity for

"Troilus and Cressida"

Shakespearean production grow by what they feed on. If this lady crave a monument for her reward, she has only to remember the vast audience which gathered it what is easily the premier theatre of London. The assembly and the playbouse were alike her creation.

Hazlitt dealt finally with Troilus and Cressida when he said that it rambles on just as it happens, but overtakes, with some indifferent matter, a prodigious number of fine things in its way. It is sprinkled with tremendous passages, undream'd felicities, and those odds and ends of speech which only Shakespeare could have uttered.

The lines which, on Wednesday, seemed to me to be most magnificently Shakespeare were the simple

> Farewell, revolted fair! and, Diomed, Stand fast, and wear a castle on thy head!

harking back, as they did, to Troilus's earlier boast :

Were it a casque composed by Vulcan's skill, My sword should bite it: not the dreadful spout Which shipmen do the hurricano call, Constringed in mass by the almighty sun Shall dizzy with more clamour Neptune's ear In his descent, than shall my prompted sword Falling on Diomed.

This is Shakespeare talking through the very tallest and glossiest of his hate. "The parrot will not do more for an almond than he for a commodious drab," is the philosopher at his least gentle; whilst

the poet is his immortal self in the reproach to Achilles:

Sweet, rouse yourself, and the weak wanton Cupid Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold, And, like a dewdrop from the lion's mane, Be shook to air.

Be sure the last four words came from no mind but Shakespeare's.

As a play there is not much to interest a modern audience. There are too many of those tedious captains, drinking delight of something less fierce than battle with their peers, "far on the ringing plains of windy Troy." You would have said the floor of some antique Senate House. One guesses that these old bores were made bearable by being cast after models well known to an Elizabethan audience and lost to us. As it was, their interminable councils were whiled away by comparing the make-up of Mr. Reyner Barton's Ulysses with Shakespeare himself, of Mr. Ernest Meads's Agamemnon with our old friend Athos, whose Dumasian respectability was admirably recaptured, of Mr. Wilfrid Walter's Achilles with John Philip Kemble posing for Sir Thomas Lawrence.

One wonders exactly what it was which so fascinated Shakespeare in this old story, to which he is always referring. Every schoolboy knows the kind of night it was when Troilus "sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents where Cressid lay." Either I dream,

or the lady crops up in Love's Labour's Lost, and half a dozen other plays. Is it possible that Miss Florence Saunders was a shade less than magical? But then Cressida is an impossible part, and requires a personality to launch whole navies and burn the topless towers of a hundred cities. ("Why 'topless'?" we can imagine Julia Mills entering in her diary after a visit to this play, or to Marlowe's.) Mr. Ion Swinley was in good vein as Troilus. He was giddy, according to text, and expectation whirled him round. Perhaps we have no other actor to-day who can enter and quit the scene so well. This Troilus, leaving the stage on that castellated admonition to Diomed, bids him stand fast with the entire line of his body—shoulder, hip, and heel. This is acting.

But a still better performance was that of Mr. Hay Petrie. (Troilus might conceivably have been better. This lover did not bring out of his instrument, passion, all the tones which Bernhardt drew when, at sixty years of age, she portrayed an amorous stripling. That was not to be expected; genius is not born every day. All the more reason why, when the miracle happens, we should be quick to note it.) Mr. Hay Petrie is a great comic genius—the finest Shakespearean "low comedian" I have ever seen. The flame which is in him is kin to that which illumined Bernhardt, Henry Irving, and Dan Leno. Only, in tragedy, the flame demands an altar before it will descend, and insists that the chosen become celebrants. It plays in kindlier fashion round

the heads of clowns, leaving them, as you might say, a trifle "touched."

Mr. Petrie's acting has the quality of a message of which he is the inconscient mouthpiece. Thus the wisdom proceeding out of the mouths of guileless fools; so the malignancy of those evilly possessed as Thersites. That the actor has made his calculations to a hairbreadth is no affair of the audience. Let them listen to this misshapen dwarf echoing the extreme of Lear's distemper. Let them watch him hitch the world's evil to the crook of a twisted forefinger. Let them mark him lurking in the shade, hardly perceived, yet dominating the entire stage. Let them look upon genius and refrain from questioning.

November 11.

"Twelfth Night"

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

KINGSWAY THEATRE

To pick and choose among the comedies of Shakespeare is to be very much in the position of Ned Softly in *The Tatler*, who, we remember, debated throughout a whole morning the order of the words, "You sing your song with so much art." Of the over-nice critic, as of Ned, it might be said that it is only a proof of a little mind ever to have entertained the question at all. Still, there may be much fun in little-mindedness; and to tackle a point impossible of determination may stimulate good debate.

Twelfth Night, wherever we may "place" it, is a good piece in which to make a managerial start. It is broad and loosely knit, with unstinted scope for beauty, and room for wit, humour, and even nonsense to turn round in. It is less, perhaps, a "play" than a revue of the fantastical disguises assumed by vanity to plague mankind. There is hardly a character who does not suffer from coxcombry. Some are born vain, you might echo, and the rest follows. Malvolio, the High Priest of this particular folly, is not lacking

in ministers. Aguecheek does clowningly that which Malvolio achieves in the grand manner. Orsino and Olivia are well matched in self-love and self-pity, and show the same vanity in differing griefs. This poem is pure chamber-music, a string quartet on a theme of egoism.

Over against all this peacockery is set one little maid. There is a sense in which Viola is the whole poem. Ever and again she comes over the mind like the sweet sound that breathes upon a bank of violets, stealing and giving odour. It is Viola who gives fragrance to this poem. It is permitted to be frankly sentimental about her. For me she is summed up in a single line of Poe:

The viol, the violet, and the vine.

Viola is all the tender grace of those exquisite words. She is Celia raised to the heroine's plane. I cannot see her as a tomboy, with a heart for any fate. If, therefore, I do not much like Miss Dorothy Cheston's heroine, it is because I like Shakespeare's—oh, ever so much more. One of my colleagues called Cesario "brisk," than which I cannot imagine anything more disheartening. Alas! that the adjective is so exactly right. Viola was as brisk as Jim Hawkins, and would have sent Aguecheek about his business with a simple box on the ear and no sword drawn. Miss Cheston makes a definite attempt upon our sensibilities in the famous "worm i' th' bud" speech, but it is an obvious attempt. Her Viola knows nothing about lovesickness, and the reply to her "Was not this love

indeed?" is in the negative. There is no matter of blame here. The actress has simply been miscast.

Miss Tree's Olivia gives food for speculation. This gracious actress should obviously play that flamboyantly - bereaved, precious, and ridiculous creature very well indeed. Valentine pinks Olivia neatly when he reports her preposterous proposal to veil herself for seven years and "water once a day her chamber round with eye-offending brine." This is the very ecstasy of pose. Olivia should progress through the piece like some fair ship in full sail dyed ostentatious black; Miss Tree makes her peevish. Olivia's beauty may be grief-ravaged, but should not look pinched; so imperious a lady would manage, one thinks, to repine without peaking and dwindling. The costumier has not been too good to Miss Tree, whose spirit is willing, but whose frocks and headgear are weak. Olivia's last dress is too pale in colour, and, while it glitters, is a-spangle with insignificance.

Mr. Baliol Holloway's Malvolio is a shade too much the gentleman, and would do better with a slight infusion of Crichton before he became quite so admirable. There is more breeding about Olivia's steward than there is about her uncle, as played by Mr. Frank Cellier. This Sir Toby is not quite the fellow to make those nice distinctions between a galliard and a coranto, a jig and a cinque-pace. Both Mr. Cellier and Mr. Holloway are, as all the world knows, exceedingly fine players, and, with these small reservations, put up admirable performances. Mr.

Nicholas Hannen, that very thoughtful actor, must simulate vacuity as Sir Andrew, and it hardly comes off. The inane is not achieved by taking thought. Miss Sydney Fairbrother's Maria may not possess all the qualities usually associated with that artful little baggage, but it is a brave shot, and decorously, Shakespeareanly contained.

Let me say that I do not want to appear to carp at anything in Mr. Calthrop's gallant enterprise, for which everybody must have the kindest hopes and wishes. The mise-en-scène is delightful and, with one exception, so, too, are the costumes. It just happens that nobody is particularly good, because nobody is particularly well suited. Mr. Calthrop, with his fine pair of actors, Messrs. Holloway and Cellier, may well challenge the "Old Vic.'s" pair, Messrs. Swinley and Petrie. But he will fare better with his challenge in some other play.

One more word. Let there be mutual help between these two good ventures. Let there be give-and-take in the matter of artists. No poet has told us that North is North, and South is South, etc. There are bridges over the Thames. Let there be the keenest, friendliest rivalry, too. One theatre possesses a good Benedick and the other a sufficient Macbeth. Let one engage Miss Edith Evans, and the other Miss Haidée Wright. Both companies are weak in heroines. And let Mr. Hay Petrie run between the two, and wag a tail of fun.

November 11.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream"

By WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

KINGSWAY THEATRE

S it possible that simplified scenery is being overdone? That this play does not go well with a setting simple as Noah's Ark was the chief impression produced upon me by Mr. Calthrop's revival. But, of course, to make these fantastic mortals and commonsensical immortals convincing on the stage is a problem which has often baffled solution. Hazlitt, we remember, suggested that the play would do admirably as a Christmas after-piece, and proposed Kean for Bottom. "What an opportunity for processions, for the sound of trumpets, and glittering of spears! What a fluttering of urchins' painted wings; what a delightful profusion of gauze clouds, and airy spirits floating on them!"

Well, they took his advice, and two months later, early in the New Year of 1816, the *Dream* was done at Covent Garden. Hazlitt, after the perverse way of critics, at once declared the thing unactable, and begged everybody's pardon for a recommendation

which had converted a delightful poem into a dull pantomime. He hoped he had not been guilty of murder! All that was fine in the play was lost in the representation. Yet Hazlitt stuck to his guns in the matter of the scenery. The genius was fled, but the spectacle had been fine. "Oh, ye sceneshifters, ye scene-painters, ye machinists and dressmakers, ye manufacturers of moon and stars that give no light, ye musical composers, ye men in the orchestra, fiddlers and trumpeters and players on the double drum and loud bassoon, rejoice! This is your triumph; it is not ours."

I am afraid that Kingsway performance is not anybody's triumph, with the exception of Peter Quince. There is hardly any scenery-none at all in the old-fashioned sense of the word-and no more than a modicum of music. We miss the leafy sense. and the tinkle of fairies. The plain truth of the matter is that our material faculties are starved: and even outraged, upon occasion. It may be that Lysander and Demetrius, Hermia and Helena cannot be humanised. In that case the thing to do is to formalise them, bid the actors ravish eye and ear with gesture and tone. If these actors have been instructed so, they have disobeyed. I do not remember ever having known such harsh sound and ungainly motion as proceeded from this quartet. Miss Viola Tree wailed and moaned, and threw her arms about as they were, in the poet's phrase, "branch-charmed by the earnest stars." Miss Joyce Carey's voice is entirely

"A Midsummer Night's Dream"

unapt for poetry, and I do not think that Shakespeare is her playwright. Neither is he Mr. S. T. Warmington's. Mr. Bruce Belfrage was better. I take this young actor to be a beginner with not very much knowledge of the stage. But at least he knows nothing wrong, and does not overlay the poetry of his part with the prose of yesterday's melodrama.

Remain the clowns and the fairies. He would be blind who failed to recognise in Quince a great Shake-spearean actor. Mr. Cellier is unrivalled in our time as Henry IV., unequalled as Cassio, a raging lion as Ford, and as Quince the very shell of a man. We have heard of the mastery of mind over matter. Mr. Cellier achieves this in terms of his own body. Set this actor in a heroic part and he will grow before our eyes. We know now what Tennyson meant when he wrote:

And I myself, who sat apart,
And watched them, waxed in every limb;
I felt the thews of Anakim,
The pulses of a Titan's heart.

Cast this actor for pantaloon and the flesh falls from him till there is nothing left save the husk of the dotard. Garrick, we are told, could subdue his piercing eye to the lack-lustre of a dead fish, or come on as a deaf man so that his audience knew of his infirmity by merely looking at him. Mr. Cellier has something of this power. You divine Quince's lack of wit and weak hams. His eyes purge amber and plum-tree gum as, conning his play-book, he gathers

together the remnants of his weak mind. A riotous spectacle, yet somehow pathetic; you would say a noble goose havering in the wilderness.

Though somewhat overshadowed, Mr. Baliol Holloway's Bottom is good. It may perhaps err on the side of being too intellectual a performance. Nick is too crafty; his egotism, one thinks, should be nore natve. The best in this line was Benson's old actor, Weir, whose tongue not only dropped fatness, in the Falstaffian sense, but licked up, as it were unconsciously, the fat in other men's parts. Mr. Holloway's Weaver would play the tyrant and the lover, the lady and the lion out of the desire to put himself forward rather than the innocent conviction of superiority. Bottom is a child who must have all the cakes on the platter. One may doubt whether Mr. Holloway's egoist would have won the nickname "Bully." This aspect apart, Bottom is admirable.

Only the clowns in this play are real. The mortals are impossible; the fairies, though they show some approach to humanity, must be neither man nor woman. Mr. Nicholas Hannen's Oberon may definitely claim to have joined the "empire of the butterflies." This was a performance of distinction. So, too, was Miss Athene Seyler's Titania, though this actress has hardly the physical qualifications for the part. Her queenly sense, however, and her beautiful diction between them made noble rescue. Mr. Hannen spoke his verse well, too. Would that the quartet of humans would pitch a note to accord

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with this fairy duo! I am grieved to say that the Puck of Mr. George Howe was not good. The intention was admirable, but not fulfilled. For one thing, this sprite gabbled as though the girdle which he would put round the earth in forty minutes had been an electoral one. If I had not known Puck's lines I do not think I should have been able to make out a single word of them. Nevertheless, Mr. Calthrop is to be thanked for not giving us the usual Dandini.

Titania's dark-clad train was a little like some troop of deep-sea girl-guides. I prefer my fairies to be blonde. To go back to the starting-point, there was not in this production enough of feasting for the eye. It is, perhaps, reactionary to suggest that the bad realistic scenery were better. It is certain that real trees, real water, and real grass, with perhaps a real lamb trained to caper strictly after Botticelli, and a Schwabe-Hasait machine in full blast-it is certain that the old-fashioned method of presentation would do this play less harm than it would the others. One harks back to that French prose-poem in which the hero insists that his mistress's robe shall be of handsomest velvet or brocade, her throat plastered with diamonds, her fingers stiff with jewels. "Je ne lui ferais pas grâce d'un anneau ou d'un bracelet." I find it difficult to dispense with the least of those sumptuosities which it has been customary to lavish upon this play, or to forgive Mr. Calthrop one single note of the Mendelssohn which he withheld.

November 18.

"Edward II."

By CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

THE PHŒNIX SOCIETY

THE revival of Marlowe's masterpiece was one of the best things ever done by the Phænix Society. The acting was magnificent all through, and there cannot be the least doubt that the play came to full and perfect life, showing no signs of its long sleep. It made the audience three hundred years younger. Three hundred and thirty-three, to be exact.

There is not much fun to be got out of play-going in the purely historical sense. Either a play is alive, or it is dead; there are no half-ways in this matter. Marlowe's Jew of Malta appeared, upon production by the Phænix, to be a rather poor joke. Whatever drama it may have contained for the Elizabethan audience was swamped, to modern taste, in that bowl of porridge. The rest of the afternoon was merry, but then merriment is not the function of tragedy.

Edward II., when performed, turns out to be a perfectly serious business. We are moved as at some story of our own day. The amount of sympathy which Marlowe arouses for the least becoming of

English kings is extraordinary. There is no maudlin repentance here, no hollow cry out of the depths; this man sees his fate and embraces it. Kingliness increases as the grasp upon kingship weakens. Marlowe's Edward is a better man than Shakespeare's Richard, puling his life away in æsthetic conceits. From disaster Edward comes, as Stevenson said of a friend of his youth, "like a spent swimmer desperately ashore. . . . He had gone to ruin with a kind of kingly abandon, like one who condescended; but once ruined, with the lights all out, he fought as for a kingdom." Richard does nothing but rail, and gives in too soon. Edward makes sure the game is up. Even when he resigns the crown he has his moment of temper.

Comparison of these two plays has always been a favourite theme with the critics. Lamb went all out when he said that the death-scene moves pity and terror "beyond any scene ancient or modern with which I am acquainted." Swinburne declared the deposition-scene to be "almost as much finer in tragic effect and poetic quality as it is shorter and less elaborate than the corresponding scene in Richard II." But let us be fair to Shakespeare. Having to do all over again that which had already been perfectly achieved, he was content to poetise and elaborate. Probably the play of Richard would have been stronger in dramatic power if the earlier play about Edward had not stood in the way. Swinburne found horror rather than terror in the death-

scene, a view which not everybody will share. Perhaps the point to make about any stage performance of this play is its exceeding interest. I do not think that anybody could have gone home until he had seen the King delivered from that dungeon. When the door swung open on Monday afternoon and the murderer recoiled at the stench, it was as though fetor filled the theatre, offending the senses of to-day, not of three hundred years ago. The last scene had a magnificently barbaric ring.

Marlowe's line in this play is not mighty; it is what Hazlitt, alluding to some undistinguished parts of Shakespeare, calls "good, sound poetry." In this play Marlowe does not scale the mountain-tops of the greater genius, but neither does he descend into the other's valleys and depressions. He comes up to his friend's shoulder, and stays there. Or you might describe this drama as a majestic table-land. Like Great Gable, it can stand to be looked at, whatever higher peaks may abound. Twice the dramatic poignancy of a single line caught me in the throat—the King's reply to Leicester:

A litter hast thou? Lay me in a hearse; and, when he is about to give the crown to the Bishop of Winchester:

Take it. What, are you moved? pity you me?

Both lines were, in the situation, "as good as Shakespeare."

If there was a fault in the almost perfect acting

it was that sufficient attention was not paid to the verse. The word "minion" was persistently pronounced "minyun," thus robbing the line of a syllable. I except Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, who spoke throughout with perfect feeling for the poetry, and gave its full four-syllable value to the last word in the line:

You know the king is so suspicious.

This lady's Queen Isabella was a very beautiful performance. But the play stands or falls with Edward, and Mr. Duncan Yarrow set that monarch, and also the tragedy, magnificently on their legs. It is, perhaps, not sufficiently recognised how rich we are in good young actors. Mr. Yarrow was suffering from a bad attack of laryngitis, and it was immensely plucky of him to play at all. Still, with such a character and such a performance up his sleeve, one understands that doctors had to be defied. In the circumstances, beauty of voice was not to be looked for, but there was compensation in great wealth and grace of gesture. Not a shade escaped this actor, and the death-scene was a piece of authentic tragedy nobly and broadly sustained.

But, then, all the actors were good. They could not choose but be, if we like so to interpret Greene's description of Marlowe as a "famous gracer of tragedians." Mr. Edmund Willard's Young Mortimer was the most vigorous piece of acting this most robustious of players has yet given. Mr. Thesiger

made a good guess at Gaveston, and indeed conveyed something of that impertinent flaunt which marks this page of English history. Very rightly he eschewed charm, and made Piers an intellectual. The Warwick of Mr. Victor Lewisohn was particularly good; you felt that this grave baron had a life of his own, away from the Court. Mr. Lawrence Anderson's Young Spencer bore himself bravely. And I have no room for a great deal more that was excellent.

November 25.

Morality Plays



"Via Crucis"

ADAPTED FROM HOFMANNSTHAL

GARRICK THEATRE

motive of religiosity but through sheer pressure of work—and possibly disposed, like the Indian fakir, to mistake the delirium of the body for the ecstasy of the mind. However that may be, the piece and Sir John Martin Harvey's acting haunted me with uncanny persistence. I fled them down the staircase of London's vulgarest supper-room, but not even the noisy band could drown the patter of monkish feet and a vague sense of dread.

The play is a readaptation of Hofmannsthal's version of Everyman. Let it be said at once that the German has vulgarised it, perhaps because, with his strong Teutonic common sense, he realised that performance lay that way. I remember seeing Everyman performed in the Manchester Free Trade Hall, that temple only one degree less dreary and dispiriting than the polemics of which it is the theatre; and I remember the overwhelming effect of the stark setting, the tremendous impression of God modelled after the early Italians and speaking through a full beard, of a

Death jocund and rather vulgar, like the Todtentanz of the Abbé Liszt, of the horrible grave made by taking the planks out of the platform. The effect was so great that for a week I mended my ways, which was probably the pious intention of that fifteenth-century monk. But—how shall I say it with modesty? such an experience is for the educated. Or possibly for the entirely illiterate. Certainly it must make faint appeal to the semi-literate of to-day, whose reading is confined to "subtitles." I do not know when Hofmannsthal's play was "released," but it has the screen written all over it. Gone are the abstractions of Fellowship, Kindred, Goods; their places taken by the individual "featured" to so much greater convenience, Everyman's Comrade, Fat Cousin, Thin Cousin, etc. The beginning had all the solemnity of the exordium to a super-film. First the house was darkened, then a bell tolled, then the orchestra preluded a mediocre voluntary, then a monk spoke, then the singularly grating voice of the Almighty broke the rules of His prosodists by rhyming "wrath" with "forth" in the best subtitle fashion, then the more melodious voice of Death, until, finally, Everyman appeared. While all this had been going on, a heart-shaped transparency had been lanterned on to a screen, linking the proceedings quite definitely to Romanist belief, whereas the peculiar virtue of the old play was that, strictly, it stood outside dogma, so that those who embrace only the beauty and tenderness of Christian idiom could

admire the writer equally with Bunyan and Thomas à Kempis. Probably those who like the bells will like the transparency and also the head of Christ which. like some ghosts of Banquo, is made apparent to the audience but to none of the actors. Much of the beauty of the piece vanishes with its austerity. There was a peculiar poignancy in those old figures of Knowledge, Beauty, Strength, Discretion, Five-Wits. Must Everyman shed all, even unto that which it was virtue that he should labour to acquire? This dropping from us of the good makes Death more terrible still. Hofmannsthal ignored this and gave Everyman no qualities save vicious ones. Perhaps he feared the uneducated mind, and so couched his version on a lower, more melodramatic, and, to the semi-simple, more "human" plane. Indeed, the episodes with Everyman's Mother, beautifully played by Miss Maud Milton, were almost unbearable in their fidelity and pathos. The first half of the play was a little tame, lit up with a single flash of emotion; the second was theatrically exciting, beginning with a banquet broken up by Death in most admired disorder, thence moving to the close through degrees of harrowing pitifulness calculated with a nice virtuosity.

What is there here, the reader may ask, that is so outside normal theatrical experience that it cannot be normally dismissed? The answer is in two words: Harvey's acting. Sir John Martin Harvey has always been a very capable romantic actor, who could draw as many tears from rubbish as the old man of the

Lyceum himself. In cape and sword, or on the steps of the scaffold, he was ever admirable. Now and again he would mysteriously insert amongst his highly coloured bits of pasteboard some wan page torn from a mediæval missal. Such was his Pelléas. I remember a piece of intolerable nonsense in which he played the boy Christ with unearthly beauty. Then there was his Burgomaster in Maeterlinck's play, a piece of flawless acting. Compare that shrinking, pot-bellied affronter of destiny with his shining Everyman, and you realise how wide is this actor's range. Sir John not only looked young, but found a voice I had not heard him use before, high-pitched and clarion, like some gong of gold. You would have said some wight of the forgotten ages, falcon on wrist, gracious, tapestried. There was little in the first act for him to do. yet he handled his phrases generously, dragging out such bits of beauty as might be lurking in the fold of the lines. This is the mark of your true actor, that he compels beauty even where no beauty is, and does not always give it the same face. It was a delight once again to be in presence of a player whose gestures are fine, yet not superfine, whose inflections square with both sound and sense, who practises economy, yet gives the impression of wealth. Add that there is that in this player's art which pipes to the spirit "ditties of no tone." The phrase is poetical, but then Harvey is poetical. His look over the shoulder when first he feels the chill breath of the Monster, the sudden disorder of the mind, the trembling reassurance

with which he touches his mistress's warm cheekall this makes up an admirable moment. Throughout the second act the actor seemed to me superb, alike in horror and amazement, in shuddering colloquy and pitiful entreaty. He tore no passion to tatters, yet allotted the desperate plight its full measure. At the beginning of the agony he gave to Everyman the quick breath of one near to dying; later, Newman's "inexpressive lightness and sense of freedom." For any simile for Harvey's acting here I must go to the hushed sweetness of the opening to the second part of Gerontius, and the theme used by Elgar to symbolise purification by the waters of Purgatory-"Softly and gently, dearly ransomed Soul." In Germany Everyman was played by a bull-necked Teuton. He would be. Harvey was all spirit, and when, at the end, the hooded figure of Death held forth his dim yet certain arms, it was a very pitiful, childlike figure that they enclosed. I do not know any other player except Bernhardt who could have given just this quality of ecstasy—of ecstasy in the literal sense, that of a soul standing beside the body, before the open grave. But in many ways and throughout the whole evening Harvey had reminded me of this, when she chooses, mistress of the ineffable.

February 10.

"Our Betters"

A COMEDY BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

GLOBE THEATRE

M. MAUGHAM, in this brilliant and almost heartless comedy, has rewritten one of Henry James's short stories in the manner of Congreve. His Elizabeth Saunders, Bessie for short, is Bessie Alden all over again, the young American heiress immensely taken with the idea of living in a castle. Young Lord Lambeth, in the book, "went with" Branches, and we remember that James's Bessie rather liked him. In the play Bleanes Castle presumably goes with young Lord Bleane, and we gather that Mr. Maugham's Bessie would have made a good show of liking his Lordship. Both young men are exceedingly well-mannered. The parallel here is really very close. It is true that the play has no Duchess of Bayswater, "large, and with a fine fresh colour," nor any Countess of Pimlico, pretty and elegant, to overawe Bessie Saunders with their fine ways and their grandeur, and make her lacher prise. It is Bessie's own fineness of character which at the last makes her let go. But isn't Bessie Alden's sensitiveness the clou of the story also?

Perhaps the play would have been more interesting to an English audience if the author had included in his satire some less negligible English characters. To have one's withers delicately wrung is one of the choicest treats the theatre can offer; to watch one's cousins wince is less intimately amusing. Mr. Maugham states in a note on the programme that the characters in the play are entirely imaginary—an advice to which the great satirist of two hundred years ago devoted the epilogue of his greatest play. Our Betters does not

"stoop so meanly low, As any one abstracted fop to show."

Mr. Maugham, in this Way of America's World, does

"in one piece expose
Whole belles assemblées of coquettes and beaux."

And he is really much nearer to Congreve than he is to James. The parallel we noted above is merely a trick of the plot; were it not for the trifle of heart, the ultimate concession to a belief in human nature, we should be acclaiming in Mr. Maugham the very spirit of Congreve.

Here again is that comedy of manners which depicts what the author himself would probably admit to be only a very small section of society. Here again is the old picture of well-bred immorality lit up by flashes of hard, conscienceless, compunctionless wit. Mr. Maugham's characters, like those of Congreve, confess their narrow interest in life, and

flit before us, as we have heard so often, without impinging upon our moral sense. Their meanness and vulgarity amuse us a little, perhaps; these qualities have certainly no power to offend. You do not ask whether a butterfly conforms to a moral standard; you pin it down and try not to destroy the bloom upon its wings. Mr. Maugham has secured a very brilliant specimen in Lady George Grayston, and with her capture has enriched that national collection which has come down to us from the Restoration.

This play is really extraordinarily deft, and its matter is handled with any amount of "style." Think, for a moment, of the way in which heavierhanded, more "sincere" playwrights would have treated that cold, calculating blonde, Lady George Grayston, that lightning calculator with the air of an inconscient featherbrain. Is it to be imagined that Mr. Sutro, for example, would have been content to leave her at the end in perfect poise upon her brazen pinnacle? Would not that husband of hers, whom Mr. Maugham keeps so adroitly in London out of discovery's way, have come trumpeting to Grayston, razed those improper towers and hauled the châtelaine off to Alaska, or some abode of Arctic chastity? Would not Sir Arthur Pinero have plunged her into suicide on the discovery that some day she must grow old and that:

> With the coming of the crow's-feet Goes the backward turn of beaux' feet?

Would not Mr. Henry Arthur Jones have probed beneath that brassy bosom to a heart of gold? Would not Wilde have let off innumerable squibs round a bonfire of sodden sentiment till the playhouse resembled a smoky backyard on a wet Fifth?

How would any one of these playwrights have treated that dark and common beauty, the Duchesse de Surennes, divided between passion and parsimony, torn between her sentiment—forgive the word—for Gilbert Paxton and that blackguard's drain upon her purse? Would not Sir James Barrie have discovered the "mother-instinct" in disguise? Would not that eager gardener, Mr. George Bernard Shaw, have exterminated her and her kind with three acts of weed-killer, maximum strength? And would not Mr. Galsworthy have found fresh cause for pity? Mr. Arnold Bennett . . . But perhaps the people who do not matter are not this writer's world.

All these are fine playwrights, yet I cannot conceive that they would have held themselves so icily detached and aloof from their miserable creatures as does Mr. Maugham. Any one of them—and I will add for this purpose the late Haddon Chambers—might have put together that excellent second act, the "great" scene in which the imprudent lady is surprised with the Duchess's lover. But would they—I do not say could they—have kept the "situation" so rigorously on the plane of heartlessness? Would there not have been question of sentiment?

It seems a paradoxical thing to say, but probably

the play would have been even finer if it had been shorn of its two honest characters, the little American backwoodsman or great-heart from the candy-store—a creation, this, after Mr. Sutro's own fancy—and the sentimentalising Principessa, a romantic creature whose marriage to a foreign prince had apparently been brought about by a too-persistent perusal of the "Songs before Sunrise" and the Italian Debrett. These two bring a blurring to the hard lines of the picture, translate us to a world where decency is, and so suggest questions of moral censure.

It is a long time since I saw a play quite so perfectly acted. It stands or falls by the two women. As Lady George Grayston, Miss Margaret Bannerman is quite ravishingly good, continually calling to mind Woodley's remark in the James story: "Here comes a great celebrity—Lady Beatrice Bellevue. awfully fast; see what little steps she takes." Bannerman has acquired a wonderful carriage of the head-half the drawings by Charles Dana Gibson, so popular a few years ago, and half Herkomer's idea of the maintien of great ladies. She exhibits a very perfect sense of well-bred comedy, and makes not the smallest concession to any kind of bourgeois decency. There is so much sparkle about her performance that whenever she appears it is as though the lights in the theatre have suddenly gone up.

I am forced to make two criticisms. One is that this actress is just the least little bit inclined to talk "upstairs," as the vulgar say. The other is that she cannot be trusted with pronouns, every one of which she endows with an entirely unnatural emphasis. "You must write to your mother," she will say, when there is no question of anybody else writing to anybody else's mother. "Of course, if you've made up your mind," she will declare in exactly the same way. This trick—for it is no more than a thoughtless habit—struck my ear early on in the evening, and became a positive affliction and martyrdom. I went in dread of the entrance of each character lest he should be received with a "And how do you do?" This apart, Miss Bannerman gives an extraordinarily fine performance, which places her amongst our most accomplished actresses.

Miss Constance Collier, as her vis-à-vis, was richly comic. She trailed behind her clouds of the porkpacking business, yet wore her clothes and her manners with an air. She was, you felt, vulgar only of soul. Her archness, her fatuousness, the ridiculousness of the Duchess's passionate forties was a pure joy. I should deem it almost an impertinence to praise the acting of Miss Marion Terry, whose art has been a standing wonder for two generations. Sometimes I think that merely to watch this actress move to an exit is to attend whole sessions of our academies of dramatic art. There is that in the mere organ-swell of her voice which moves me unreasonably. Mr. Reginald Owen played the extremely difficult part of the Duchess's gallant with the very nicest tact. It could have been extraordinarily unpleasant, and the

actor's avoidance of quite shocking pitfalls was a veritable tour de force.

Mr. Alfred Drayton's strong man, an inversion of Mr. Sutro's sublimest projection, was indeed capital. It is a curious thing that all young American "leads" should be so uniformly pleasant, and pleasing in the same way. Mr. Stuart Sage's Fleming Harvey, the young, unsophisticated backwoodsman, was entirely disarming. To listen to him you seemed to be hearing Merton of the Movies all over again. Bathos lurked in the part; Mr. Sage succeeded in being both adroit and moving. Bessie was difficult to do, and Miss Alice Moseley put up a very game fight. Mr. Yorke Stephens was by no means hateful in an odious part, and five minutes of Mr. Henry Ford's dancing-partner were full of entertainment.

September 16.

"Back to Methuselah"

A METABIOLOGICAL PENTATEUCH BY BERNARD SHAW

BIRMINGHAM REPERTORY THEATRE

A LL honour to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre that it should have upheld, and all shame to the forty playhouses of London that they should have set aside, this first testament of one of the keenest intellects since Man went erect upon two legs. So I felt in the train, rereading that logical, riotous, and earnest preface. The mood lasted throughout "In the Beginning," which is Part I. of the play, then began slowly to fall from me; and if I retain the sentence which embodies it, it is purely because of that soul-shaking, sobering overture. There is poetry and there is dignity in that first part, something of the awe of new-made Man in face of the new-created World. The Garden of Eden once behind us, the play for a time loses its quality. Part II., "The Gospel of the Brothers Barnabas," in so far as it is a lampoon upon living statesmen, is in shocking taste. But taste is a trifle, we feel, to a dramatist who is out to create a new Heaven and a new Earth. On second thoughts, not a new Heaven; Mr. Shaw is content to

agree that God is in His place. But he sees neither God nor health nor even horse-sense in the Earth beneath, and is very far from content.

What, after all, does taste matter when a man is trying to be honest, not only with his own soul, but with everybody else's? "I am the first murderer; you are only the first man," cries Cain to Adam; and it comes upon us in a flash that Cain, by taking away life, has enriched the universe by an idea, though it is the evil one of killing. Cain is a more selfish, that is, a more wicked creature than his father; but he is also a more complicated one, and we feel that but for that act of destruction civilisation, as we know it, might never have been. That Mr. Shaw should make Cain quote Tennyson in justification is purely his fun; that he should see Cain's act as something different from the copybook view of murder depends from his intense seriousness.

What do Burge and Lubin matter when we realise that they are only windbags suspended from gibbets to be sardonically executed? Mr. Shaw impales both on the same lance, and his wit is as the wit of ten because his soul has the purity which comes from being at white-heat. Burge recalls the time when "the Hun was at the gate," and "our country, our lives, the honour of our wives and mothers and daughters, the tender flesh of our innocent babes, were at stake." Was that the time, Burge asks, to argue about principles? And the smashing reply comes that this, above all others, was the time. Un-

fortunately, I was unable to see the second part. It reads magnificently, and I am told that it acted well. The first part was certainly enhanced by actual visualisation.

Nothing, I think, could be done by any actors with Parts III. and IV., "The Thing Happens" and "The Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman." These were played on Thursday afternoon and evening, and I found the day one of quite insufferable tedium. Passion straggles to an end in sandy deltas of dreamy talk. The characters in 2170 A.D. sit round a table, or, in 3000 A.D., on two rocks by a seashore, and blether. There is nothing for the brain to get hold of, except when reincarnated Napoleon puts up the Ibsenitish poser: I am a genius whose expression is slaughter. Must I fulfil myself to the world's hurt, or become a nobody to the general profit? The Oracle cuts the knot of his difficulty by shooting him, whereupon Napoleon scrambles to his feet, exclaiming: "Missed me at five yards! That's a woman all over." A great part of this act is taken up with some silly joking about the Jews and the Irish, which is Mr. Shaw all over. Yet, in the welter, we encounter passages of extraordinary significance. There is one about dead languages and dead thought, and another about the impossibility of the heart being in any but the right place, in contra-distinction to the hands which may be in one's neighbour's pockets. "It's the hands which really matter."

The last part, "As Far as Thought Can Reach,"

takes up the passion again, but it has become a fury of immolation, not only of self, but of all that normal man holds dear. In Shaw's world of 31,920 A.D., beauty, art, love, even motherhood, are to go. human body is to lose its beauty, and cease to concern The hills are to leave skipping and declare themselves the sloughing skin of the world. Lastly, Matter itself is to disappear and only Life remain, but this is getting close to the inconceivable. We are more concerned with Mr. Shaw's ideal world. Here we find the culmination of an attitude towards sex which has been strongly marked throughout—the attitude of aversion. Eve, in the beginning, expresses intense repugnance; Lubin, in our day, is drawn as a senile fribble; Zoe, the young woman of the middle distance, will not speak of her parents; and finally all beauty in the relations of Man and Woman is denied. But the play is a "metabiological pentateuch," and we do not believe that biology works through repulsion. This denial of beauty in normal human relationship seems to me to be an immense blot upon a great work. Harking back to Ibsen, we might call the cycle by an alternative name: "Flight of Wild Duck."

Yet the preface shows immense reverence for all that the play denies. A lifetime of adoration of "the stars of heaven, the showers and dew, the winter and summer, the mountains and hills," seventy years of the love of beauty, art, and religion, find their climax and epitome here. It is because this prophet has so deep a respect for whatever it is that Man is on earth

to accomplish that he is so ruthless when accomplishment is marred. "The power that produced Man when the monkey was not up to the mark can produce a higher creature than Man if Man does not come up to the mark. If Man is to be saved, Man must save himself."

Of a female character in The Way of All Flesh Samuel Butler said that she was spiritually-minded and possessed of an incipient beard. Mr. Shaw is the most spiritually-minded writer for the stage since Goethe, and his beard, full-grown, has long been a national possession. In this preface, and afterwards in the play, he wags it furiously, truculently, in the face of us all, tickling our chins with it that we may raise them to Heaven. The war found our boasted civilisation wanting. It was the business, Mr. Shaw holds, of Britain, Germany, France, and America to impose peace on the world and nurse modern civilisation in Russia, Turkey, and the Balkans. If the Western Powers had selected their Allies intelligently, i.e. in the Lamarckian manner, purposely and vitally, ad majorem Dei gloriam, there would have been no war. But the Powers did not choose this way, preferring to bid for the advantage of the survival of the fittest through selection which was both circumstantial and opportunist, and so brought about something not far removed, Mr. Shaw thinks, from the death of Civilisation and the destruction of Mankind.

"Fit to govern? No, not to live!" cries Macduff 120

in the Shakespeare play. Not fitted to live for so short a time as threescore years and ten, says our author. At seventy Man is still an intellectual child. Salvation can only come about by increasing his span to three hundred years, a feat to be achieved by Creative Evolution, or the will to become. Mr. Shaw makes great play with the Lamarck-Darwin controversy. Lamarck said that the giraffe evolved his neck by wanting and trying, Darwin that the giraffe did not consciously ponder anything at all, but that what happened was that if his neck did not turn out to be long enough he died. But was there not once a little girl who found another solution? "Why is the giraffe's neck so long?" she was asked. And she replied, simply and naturally, "Please, teacher, to reach to its head!" Mr. Shaw's play is so long because it has to reach to that idea fixed in its author's head that increase of years must bring increase of wisdom. This is sublime optimism. Many of us take the more pessimistic view that length of days means length of obstinacy, and that a clean sweep and a fresh lot every seventy years is man's best hope.

I am not going to pretend that I have the key to this enormous work. Mr. Shaw tells us of an uncle who, if he had lived another twenty years, would have known all about Darwin, and known it all wrong. One is chary of falling into the same mistake as our fathers who, when Darwin said that some monkeys have no tails, persisted in understanding that we all have tails like monkeys. Mr. Shaw will probably

tell me that I have made neither tail nor head of his testament, and one remembers what Henry James said of Tennyson, that he could as little receive as impart knowledge. What I do know about these plays is that Mr. Shaw conceives, or makes Adam conceive, life in the Garden of Eden as unbearable ennui. Adam discovers Death, in the form of a dead fawn, as a blessed relief, to be postponed, however, for a thousand years or so. And straightway Mr. Shaw gets into speculative waters which even he, being human, has not the intellect to tread. We do not believe in the ennui. We do not believe that the theory and practice of generation came to Eve in a warring combination of elation and disgust; we believe rather in some "heavenly mingle" of ecstasy and responsibility. Lastly, we do not believe in "the day when there will be no people, only thought." Or perhaps we do not want to believe. It is maintained by many that there is no beauty in the universe except in the eye of the beholder. It may be maintained that to human beings there is no joy in thought without thinkers. That, to one mind at least, would be boredom as strict as the ennui attributed to Adam.

But the real fault of this play-cycle is that it contains no practical philosophy. In saying this I am willing to concede that drama which is not dramatic may have other virtues, and that, on occasion, the theatre may justifiably turn itself into a schoolroom. When, however, the playgoer consents to be lectured to, it is on condition that the lecturer shall talk to

some constructive purpose. Man is not going to live for three hundred years by discarding his golfclubs and cigars. Too much time is wasted in elaborating the details of an impossible fantasy, of which the end, though labelled ecstasy, is to a human mind unthinkably dull and horrid. Man, when Mr. Shaw has done with him, is in unspeakably worse case than he is when Mr. Shaw takes him up. Rain down upon him the sores and shames of war, steep him in poverty, unemployment, and starvation, and he is yet not so miserable a creature, nor, we may add, so ill-mannered, as these fantastic men and women of the future. This play is too full of what Othello calls "exsufflicate and blown surmise." Mr. Shaw keeps his eye too singly on the politicians and the war-makers, and has no glance to spare for the people. And it is the people who matter in the long run. Those graves in Flanders should have told him that it is better to be as we are, even if from time to time we are misled to destruction, than to discard our humanity and become a formula. Better, one thinks. for civilisation to be submerged once more than for it to be re-formed on the Shavian model.

I have not space to deal adequately with the acting, all of which was supremely intelligent. Mr. Colin Keith-Johnston made an admirable Gaugin of Adam. The Serpent was played by Miss Edith Evans, an actress who, if managers and producers and castarrangers had any sense, would long ago have been acknowledged as one of the most brilliant actresses,

"Back to Methuselah"

both by temperament and intellect, of any time and any country.

Mr. Shaw was royally supported throughout, and only lack of space prevents me from winding up with a long list of names to be honoured.

October 14.

"Outward Bound"

A FANTASY BY SUTTON VANE

GARRICK THEATRE

WHEN this fantasy was first produced at the Everyman Theatre five weeks ago I said that it began quite extraordinarily well, that it wound up in passion, but that the middle part was a wilderness. One could not, at Hampstead, see the trees for the desert. The Theatre Guild, working away at this second act with spade and sand-cart, has freed it from obliterative verbiage, and discovered a little city of thought. The result is that this play turns out, as one half-suspected it might, to be one of the very best of the season.

Sometimes one is afraid that the enthusiasm of a critic may be a trifle suspect, that the ordinary playgoer, nosing the high-brow taint, may be "discouraged," as Mr. Shaw's superwoman would put it. The average person goes to the theatre to be amused and excited, and he is afraid that what has amused and excited the critic may fail to move him. There is no difficulty about accepting the average person's theory of the function of the theatre; the trouble is with the playwrights who practise it. On one hand

you have the "popular," or, as I should prefer to call him, the contemptuous playwright, whose scorn for his public is such that he deems it incapable of being tickled or thrilled by any matter above the comprehension of a nursemaid. On the other, you have the "intellectual" dramatist, too arrogantly absorbed in his cerebrations to care what sort of entertainment they provide in the theatre.

The critic, then, has choice of two wearinesses—the play of puling predicaments inanely presented, and the tremendous issue put together like a Blue Book. And of two boredoms he naturally chooses the brainier. But the whole health of our advancing theatre is in this—that a new race of medial playwrights is at hand who take their public seriously and themselves lightly. These present us with themes worthy of a grown man's interest, and then deal with them through suspense and climax, mystification and resolution, hilarity and tears—the medium of the theatre, in a word. Mr. Sutton Vane is such a playwright.

Outward Bound is as serious as the Pilgrim's Progress. It possesses a sharper expectancy, a finer rapture, a deeper tenderness, a keener humour, a greater momentum than you will find in the concoctions of the contemptuous dramatist. It has a more human appeal, a greater amount of workaday interest, than is possessed by such an arrogant conundrum as, for example, When We Dead Awaken. This for the reason that the playwright has reproduced not only

those deeper currents and eddies which make up the grand flood of life, but also some of its surface ripples, which in the theatre move us so nearly. Given the premise—that the passengers on board this boat are dead people waking to the Hereafter which each has carved out of his earthly existence—the rest follows logically, without flaw. The "situation" is one which a thinking man may ponder for three hours without loss of self-respect. The plight of the characters is not of that shallow, ankle-deep variety which may be conveniently investigated by our nursemaid over the handles of her perambulator; but neither are we taken out of our depths in the uncompromising Norwegian way.

I do not know any scene in Grand Guignol playlet or full-blooded, crook melodrama which is calculated to make the heart knock at the ribs like that uncanny first act. There is something wrong with the boat; you know that it is the ship of the dead long before the passengers have wakened out of that trance which they still believe to be life. Technically, the thing is extraordinarily clever. These people give you the impression that a veil has dropped behind them, yet you cannot put your finger on a single eerie sentence. This is real horror—the dramatist's horror, not the illusionist's bogy. The drama of contempt holds no pair of lovers whose coming together, after four acts of tea-parties and talk, is as significant of rapture as the wan clinging of the two who, in this play, have willed to die.

It has been said that one of the grandest moments in all literature is when César Birotteau, wholesale perfumer, falls to his knees on realising that he must file his petition. "César retomba sur sa bergère, de là sur ses genoux, sa raison s'égara, il redevint enfant; sa femme le crut mourant, elle s'agenouilla pour le relever; mais elle s'unit à lui, quand elle lui vit joindre les mains, lever les yeux et réciter avec une componction résignée la sublime prière des catholiques."

Now, I am emboldened to declare that the passage in this play in which the clergyman falls to his knees is as good as Balzac. The poor fellow has not, at the supreme moment, much faith in prayer, but prayer is his "job," as he puts it, and in any case his fellowpassengers are looking to him. Their reason, like César's, is tottering; they, too, have become children. And so he whispers the prayer he was first taught: "Bless Father and Mother, bless Nurse, bless me, and make me a good boy. For Christ's sake. Amen." I cannot think that this is not a supremely affecting moment, that the most callous playgoer would not be affected, that to rouse emotion of this quality is not the function of the theatre. Obviously, it is the duty of every serious playgoer to see this play. But my whole point is that it is not a piece written solely for students and critics. It is a play for every man who has a heart to be touched or a sense of humour to be tickled. For it contains, incidentally, some admirable fun.

The Theatre Guild has made only one mistake, that of casting Mr. Leslie Faber for the part of the wastrel, who, it is frequently insisted upon in the text, is a weakling and mere boy. I have the greatest admiration for Mr. Faber. He is an extremely fine actor, and in certain parts is not to be equalled. But strength and not weakness is his forte; and he never, for a single moment, gets near the part of the young scapegrace. This character was played most beautifully at Hampstead by a young actor whose natural boyishness condoned Prior's polite lapses and pleaded for his graver ones. Mr. Frederick Cooper, starting with the confidence that we could accept the boy at his face value, was able to work up to a hysterical climax of great power. Not so Mr. Faber, who, realising that his personality is one of domination, finds himself compelled to put forth less than a tenth of his powers. To think that this actor could subdue himself to this part and remain effective was a strange error.

Mr. Cooper had the quality of being fey; Mr. Faber contains his soul magnificently. But containment in this part is all wrong. The boy is literally in ecstasy, standing in horror beside his own soul. If this play should fail, which is unthinkable, poetic justice will have been executed on the management which ignored Mr. Cooper. This young actor made the play at Hampstead, and should have been given his chance.

Mr. William Stack is the only member of the Garrick

"Outward Bound"

company who possesses the quality of feyness. He and Miss Diana Hamilton move through this play like ghostly echoes of Dante; their unity in isolation—standing close together like figures on a medal, yet apart from their kind—shows a fine sense of the power to convey meaning through the eye. Mr. John Howell is good and Mr. Stanley Lathbury repeats his exquisitely-keyed performance. Miss Gladys Ffolliott's harridan is an unending joy. Remains Miss Clare Greet. Now it has happened to me upon occasion entirely to overlook this very perfect artist. One does not praise the sun for shining. So I shall simply say of her Mrs. Midgett that she is all the mothers who have ever loved little children.

October 21.



Revivals



Three Revivals

- "Magda." By HERMANN SUDERMANN. THE PLAYHOUSE
- "The Gay Lord Quex." By A. W. PINERO. HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE
- "The Importance of Being Earnest." By OSCAR WILDE. HAYMARKET THEATRE

BSEN, that crotchety figure of our 'nineties, and most other nations' 'seventies and 'eighties, makes his presence felt in two of these plays. Magda finds the sedulous, persistent Teuton puffing and blowing at the coat-tails of foreign genius; Quex exhibits the discreet Englishman making off in the opposite direction as fast as his legs will carry him. Prior to this comedy, Sir Arthur had at least two shots at the manner of Ibsen without getting anywhere near the core of the matter to be handled. He showed us how profligacy might, in certain circumstances, elaborately and ingeniously devised, turn out to be very awkward for the profligate. Whereas Ibsen would have demonstrated first, that selfishnesswhich is what profligacy really amounts to-must always hurt the egoist even more than it hurts his victim, and second that a man lustily and effectively

absorbed in himself is better than your feeble, self-effacing altruist. To fulfil one's self in hell is better than to crawl into heaven through the legs of a better man. That is the whole gist of Ibsen's plays, and of that admirable pastiche, Magda.

But it isn't Pinero's gist or anything like it. I always feel that if Sir Arthur had not been destined to become our leading playwright he would have been President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants. An inveterate striker of moral balances, he has all the terms pat. "She paid," says Hillary Jesson succinctly as any bank clerk, referring to Annabel Jesson's carryings-on. "Her account is balanced. Two thick black lines are scored under it. The book's closed." Whatever Sir Arthur's plays may be as drama they are neatly ruled specimens of ethical book-keeping. Quex, notoriously, has made love to a great many women. But, arrues Sophy, Captain Bastling makes love to as many as ne can get, so what's the odds? And she decides that of two immoral men her Muriel shall marry the one for whom she cares least. Whereas, morally speaking, she ought not to marry either. For all thinking people Quex is a tragedy; the poor fellow is going to be horribly bored by Muriel during the short time that remains before he is to look upon her as his nurse. It is the tragedy of the elderly satyr married to a ninny, of Balzac's arch-roué, buried with his heiress in remote provinces, eating his heart out, subscribing to cattleshows and signing his letters to Paris "late Maxime de Trailles." But, bless you, didn't I say that in this play Sir Arthur had got tired of moral preoccupation and turned his back upon it? So long as his books balance superficially, it doesn't matter if they are just the least bit falsified. Kipling's

For the more you 'ave known o' the others
The less you will settle to one,

would be an awkward entry. A deft scratch of the pen and "more" in place of "less" in the second line makes it all right.

> An' the end of it's sittin' and thinkin', An' dreamin' Hell-fires to see . . .

Rubbish! This is the mood when, as Sir Chichester Frayne elegantly says, a lot of champagne underneath a great deal of whisky betrays the skeleton beneath the rounded cheek. Ibsen, you know, was very often in the mood for sitting and thinking. Whereas up and doing suited Sir Arthur better, and he gave us this jolly comedy whose third act is as exciting a bit of fencing as the English stage knows. Personally I am inclined to think that Sophy mismanaged that affair of the cheque, that in real life she would have pocketed it, cashed it, blabbed to Muriel, and explained to her lover the circumstances in which her supposed confession was extorted. Seven thousand pounds would have been a great help towards smoothing the way of confidence for even the most suspicious of professional palmists. Seeing this play after a lapse of twenty years, I recalled the surprise which Sir Arthur used

regularly to spring upon me; how, just as Sophy forgot the jealous Valma's presence in the house, so I, a spectator, also forget it. I was curious enough to make inquiries of several people to whom the revival came as a new play, and in each case the same shock of surprise was confessed. This is a tribute to Sir Arthur's craftsmanship. Sometimes we may think that he has not much to say, but then, how brilliantly he says it!

Quex dates in other ways besides the faint impropriety further implied in the notion of saloons for manicure, in the allusion to the new craze for bicycling and the Duchess of Strood's "Put me into something loose." (If Her Grace had put on anything looser than her 1923 dinner-frock, not all the hutching and thrutching in the world could have kept her decent.) The things which date this play are the question at the back of it, the way that question is burked, and the nature of the secondary plot. Ostensibly the play sets out to decide whether a "creamy English girl" should marry a man "with a past." The practice had been going on in this country for centuries, but was apparently not ripe for discussion until the 'nineties. What we find ourselves really discussing is the cost at which a Duchess's reputation may be saved. But we have moved on since then, thanks to Ibsen. In his dry, charmless way, that philosopher would have us count the cost, not of lost reputations, nor even of lost chastity, but of a too rigid insistence upon that virtue. "I am I,"

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says Ibsen's Magda—the portrait is signed Sudermann, but that is of little consequence—and she demands freedom from all conventional restraints. But since egoism must recoil somewhere, it falls on the head of her father, a disciplinarian and radoteur of the old school. Perhaps it occurs to you that Hedda Gabler, Ibsen's pet egoist, could do no better than shoot herself. But then Hedda had the finical outlook of the artist—a class which Ibsen always hated—whereas Magda was that quite other thing, the "artiste" of the popular Press, the flamboyant, exaggerated creature with a voice and an income, temperament, no manners, and a healthy supply of vulgarity. Bernhardt played her, quite rightly, as an exuberant cabotine; Duse, of course, put her dignified, ironical self on the stage with a dash of Florence Nightingale and the Monna Lisa; our most wilful English actress relied solely upon Mrs. Pat. But however the part be played, it is clear that Magda will wreck others but not herself. It is the tinkering, half-hearted sort, the Heddas, who make a mess of their destiny. There is scope for queer, lawless questioning in Ibsen's plays. Old-fashioned? Yes, but so is Mont Blanc. That lump of rock and Ibsen's flinty genius were both fashioned some time ago. Yet both persist. So, too, does Sudermann's drama; whereas Quex is as out of date as those bottles of Frangipanni sold in its once so modish and so shocking saloon.

Miss Gladys Cooper's Magda was small and, except for the outbursts which were well done, not sufficiently

effective to reach me in the back row of the stalls. (I have come to the conclusion that actors and actresses are a much maligned race. They are said to be greedy of praise. Were this the case they would, I think, so place their critics that they might form an exact opinion of the fineness of their work.) Miss Cooper was, I venture to think, badly supported. For once in a way I did not like Mr. Franklin Dyall, whose father looked like an old, old man, but was, one felt, only a clever young actor in disguise. Mr. Gilbert Hare's Von Keller was unamusing and ineffective; Germania herself should not be more ludicrously self-important. Mr. William Stack's Heffterdingk seemed to me to be admirable and quite the best performance in the piece. There is comparatively little to be said for the acting in Quex, except that Miss Irene Browne put up an excellent fight against an old memory. She had not Miss Irene Vanbrugh's adorable assumption of commonness, but then neither had that lady Miss Browne's emotional power. Miss Viola Tree made delicious fun of the Duchess, with or without her creator's leave. As usual, Rosina Filippi got more out of her part than was in it. I am afraid I thought that Mr. George Grossmith could easily have been mistaken for the admirable man-servant which Ouex doubtless took down with him to Lady Owbridge's.

Who can judge of the "dating" propensities of a piece which he has known by heart any time these

thirty years? I imagine that on the evening of the first performance, Valentine's Day of 1895, this piece took rank as a classic. It is, and it always was, a classic. Raleigh on Death, Burke on Marie Antoinette, Wilde on Thistledown—these things neither change nor date.

In Peacock's Headlong Hall there is a Mr. Gall, who, after distinguishing between the picturesque and the beautiful, adds to them, in the laying-out of grounds, a third and distinct character which he calls unexpectedness. "Pray, sir," asks a Mr. Milestone, "by what name do you distinguish this character, when a person walks round the grounds for the second time?" Alas, that there is not a shade of this quality left to the connoisseur of Wildean artifice. His tricks and his gambits are known to all. His ripostes are as familiar as Black's Pawn to King's 4th. There is not much beauty in this little play, even of a moral sort, and to act it out of the costume of the 'nineties is to rob it of some accretion of the picturesque. The best we can do is to lean back in our stall, close our eyes, and listen for the rhythm of the thought and the balance of the expression. For this comedy is as essentially an intellectual exercise as Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding.

One gathered that there were a great many people in the house who were making first acquaintance with the play. They laughed too soon, and did not always wait for the chord to be resolved. For example, they roared as soon as Worthing said, with

reference to the cloakroom at Victoria in which he had been deposited: "The Brighton line." Whereas the point is Lady Bracknell's immediate "The line is immaterial." But age cannot wither such imperishables as "German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so."

The piece was well acted. Mr. Faber, than whom, when he is suited, there is no better actor in England, played John Worthing as well as it ever was, or ever could be, played. Mr. Deverell can hardly be said to act, that is, assume, Algernon or any other character. Parts, as parts, roll off him not so much like water off a duck's back as dewdrops shaken from a lion's mane. Each time the actor stands forth his magnificently imperturbable self. I do not believe Shakespeare could have stood up to him. Perhaps Miss Margaret Scudamore's Lady Bracknell was not quite old enough to be the perfect dragon. The young ladies of Miss Doris Kendal and Miss Nancy Atkin were young and ladylike, which is high praise for English ingénues. None could have wondered that the Rev. Canon Chasuble, D.D., of Mr. H. O. Nicholson ultimately decided to hang upon the lips of Miss Louise Hampton's Miss Prism without benefit of metaphor drawn from bees.

April 14 and November 25.

Modern Plays



"A Roof and Four Walls"

A PLAY BY E. TEMPLE THURSTON

Apollo Theatre

HEN I have known you as long as I have known Ruth Rolt," says Dick Phenyl to Mrs. Gilfillian, "nothing will induce me to speak ill of you." Nothing will induce me to speak ill of an entertainment of which I have enjoyed every moment. Despite the fact that I was badly placed, I enjoyed Mr. Temple Thurston's A Roof and Four Walls, so admirably was it acted and produced, helped on from scene to scene now by the flamboyance of the leading lady, now by her sincerity, here by a pretty setting, there by a spray of song; all these things treading so agreeably upon each other's heels that presently it was ten o'clock, and though there was no play as yet, and no sign of any to come, I was not bored. The third act sprang a surprise in the shape of a young actor, who held us entranced with a Marquis of Steyne à la mode, so exquisitely poised and mannered that soon it was eleven o'clock,

wraps were being gathered, and everybody was saying what a pleasant evening it had been, and how greatly Miss Phyllis Neilson-Terry had improved, and how cleverly that unknown Mr. Allan Jeayes had acted. But not a word about the play.

If I repeat the old commonplace that the way in which to get the best out of a West End piece is to leave your intelligence at home, it is because I want to fasten the blame on to the proper shouldersthose of the "intellectuals" on both sides of the curtain, who, in this country, do the serious theatre so much harm. Go to Hampstead and you will find a lot of moping owls complaining in whispers and horn-rimmed spectacles of the Decay of the Drama. It is for these sad followers that the Repertory playwright bedews his tearful manuscript, presenting life as though it were a passage from the womb to the grave so short, as Stevenson says, as to be hardly decent, and with no time at all for joy. The West End playwright rushes to the opposite pole, exchanges the shroud for the domino and pretends that life is one long thé dansant. Mr. Temple Thurston, in his anxiety not to be mistaken for a repertory playwright, has written a comedy which belongs to the pre-Ibsen, pre-Shaw, even pre-Pinero era. Nearly fifty years ago, in 1878 to be exact, Ibsen wrote a play to show that a wife is not a husband's chattel, or legalised mistress, but a partner of his body and spirit, bankbalance and bank-overdraft. How, if Nora had come into a fortune, would Ibsen have flayed that poor

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creature, Torwald Helmer, not for accepting, but for accepting under protest! "It takes a big man to live on a woman's money," says Mr. Thurston's Torwald, and we shudder to realise how near he had been to using the word "earnings" with its unpleasant aura. Nor is the author fair. His husband is neither souteneur nor idler, but an industrious. albeit unsuccessful, composer; indeed, we never see him when he is not strumming with his left hand and assiduously jotting down crotchets and quavers with his right. His genius brings to the partnership some two hundred a year, his wife's voice, alas! some four thousand. Now, we ask ourselves, does it really take a "big man" to accept the position? May not any ordinary man with an ordinary, decent view of marriage, accept the common good-fortune honourably and loyally? That the situation should prove irksome to this husband shows that he still regards his wife as an inferior. He summons up courage to talk of "my" house and "my" roof; whereas the pronoun should, in all modern decency, be "our." For ten minutes the play hovered Ibsenwards. "I will not have Lord Quihampton in my house!" trumpeted Helmer, and Nora was on the point of saying "Torwald, you forget yourself! You forget that I am the breadwinner, with the right to invite to my house whomsoever I like." But Nora did not say this. Instead she gave her pretty head a toss like that of a pert housemaid and said, "Darling, I am quite able to take care of my-

self!" which so annoyed Torwald that he retired in dudgeon to his country cottage. And, of course, Nora couldn't take care of herself, couldn't prevent the Marquis from asking himself to dinner, or herself from receiving him in the afternoon, or resist singing a love song "at" him, or free herself from those strong arms in which, after making the plebeian inquiry as to whether Torwald was on the premises, the wicked Quihampton enfolded her. Enter Torwald; exit Q. "Excuse me for a moment," says the husband, "while I throw a few things into a bag. I'm off to America!" But Nora sings another love song, this time at Helmer. And all is well. The husband is to go on earning his two hundred a year and to make up the balance in the capacity of chuckerout of lecherous peers, all of which is pure 1860. Let Mr. Thurston, who has an eye to a situation and a command of dialogue often witty, occasionally brilliant and always unforced, set himself down to write a play about marriage in which the normal and sensible husband no more resents his wife's access of wealth than a Zulu opposes a dowry unpredecented in head of cattle. The old-fashioned Zulu is right, the modern husband is right; it is the Victorian Mr. Thurston who is wrong. And let Mr. Thurston remember that the real artist, however unsuccessful monetarily, knows himself to be the equal, and more than the equal, of the singer who is not an artist but merely a prima donna. Mr. Thurston's comedy was saved by its actors; in the provinces, in what is called

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the No. 2 towns, with a No. 3 company, it will be dreadful.

I have already said that Mr. Jeayes was excellent; let me add that he was inventive. He wore that air of unstudied insolence which is so much more effective than the studied, and spoke throughout with that regard for the niceties of manner which so often betrays disregard for the fine points of conduct. You would have said a Steward of the Jockey Club turned Satyr, a Lord Rochester perverted to a Gilles de Rais. Complementary to him was the Mr. Bollon of Mr. H. R. Hignett, the most dejected of pianotuners, in his private life conceivably a Druid, Shepherd, or Buffalo, convivial in lodge, in his professional capacity the very genius of the broken-in-spirit. Ever since this actor, in his Benson days, first cast his mantle over those indistinguishable Dukes who hang about the antechambers of the Shakespearean Histories, I have suspected him to be a genius. Now, I know it. Mr. O. B. Clarence, another fine actor, gave an "impression" of Mr. Nigel Playfair, as that stalwart would have appeared if vinegar, and not blood, had run in his merry veins. As the husband, Mr. Nicholas Hannen was very, very good. But the entertainment depends upon Miss Phyllis Neilson-Terry, who should really insist upon a dramatist who shall stand up to her six feet, or so it seems, of British beef and bone and cheer. Just as her mother was a reincarnation of Mrs. Jordan, so this young actress is a Mrs. Yates in the making, able to bear the brunt

of a passion in the grand manner. Brünhilde and not Rosalind should be her mark. Mr. Thurston asks her, in the early acts, to be kittenish; and how clever Miss Neilson-Terry has become is proved by the fact that she can encompass this and not look silly. She listens admirably, and when she speaks delivers that which obviously proceeds from the mind. She has a glorious presence. But I implore her not to toss her head like a "tweeney," and to avoid dragging her feet, audibly, over the linoleum. I pray also that she may never sing quite, quite in tune lest the Choir of Heaven hear, and make that voice its own.

January 27.

"The Young Idea"

A COMEDY BY NOEL COWARD

SAVOY THEATRE

NE remembers Mr. Noel Coward's first play as a very light and entirely admirable comedy. His second, The Young Idea, if you examine it closely, reaches after more than it can grasp-a good fault in a young writer. Superficially it is exhilarating and great fun. The two plays together suggest original talent, a feeling for the theatre, and a quite extraordinary belief in the existence of an audience capable of intellectual delight. It is unusual to find an actor sufficiently interested in plays to undertake the writing of them, and perhaps I may suggest that Mr. Coward is not, primarily, a player. He always seems to me to stand beside his impersonations, to turn them inside out for curious inspection, to quiz them. Whatever character he essays at once becomes un original, and the original fellow is always the actor's own self. The onlooker is stimulated by a piece of vivisection rather than illuded by a creation, is conscious of an intelligence rather than a temperament.

When it comes to playwriting, Mr. Coward follows the old painter's recipe, and mixes his characters

with his brains. One would call his play a farcical comedy if that term had not been debased to mean unreal people behaving as it is impossible that even unreal people should behave. Broadly speaking, all but two of Mr. Coward's characters are real; the comedy consists in the way in which these are led to act by two deliberately unreal people of the genus enfant terrible, horrific as humanity would be if it were put together, with synthetic malice, in the laboratory. The play is styled a "comedy of youth"; it is really a comedy of impingement. Sholto and Gerda are George Brent's children by a wife whom he has allowed to divorce him. They and their mother live in Italy. Brent has now married Cicely, who is continually unfaithful to him and at the moment is "carrying on" with Rodney Masters. The boy and girl arrive on a visit, sentimentally agog to reunite their father and mother, cynically prepared to foster any scheme whereby this may be accomplished. Their first entrance strikes the note of wilful improbability, beginning with parodies of the conventional return to paternal arms, of the conventional attitude towards " second " mothers. At once we ask ourselves whether these people are real, and are perfectly satisfied with the answer that they are not meant to be real. Mr. Coward uses them as his slaves of the ring, to tilt at absurd notions and preposterous people, the huntingfolk who talk of "hands" and "seat" to the exclusion of philosophy and art, the young bloods who, when they slide down banisters on a tea-tray, hide drunken

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folly under the cloak of an "amusing rag." Brother and sister engineer Cicely's elopement, and return to Italy to complete the reconciliation on their mother's side.

Let me reiterate that throughout the play the young folk did not utter a single word which, in the circumstance, could normally have been uttered. They made dialectical, Puck-ish rings round their elders, always on the theme of: "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" Numberless situations were saved by the concoction of an impossible story. You didn't believe, and, to pretend that you did, shot your mind to some upper storey of ironic meaning, for all the world as if you were at an Ibsen play. The grownup reply would be on the matter-of-fact, or downstairs plane, then up to the attic again, then down once more, and so on, so that full comprehension became a feat of intellectual gymnastics. To judge by the comfortable laughter round about me, other people seemed to find the play easier of apprehension; perhaps they just took the excellent jokes as they came. But there is something in the make-up of this young playwright beyond the mere farceur. And therefore I would suggest to him that the habitto change the metaphor—of driving tandem with Comedy in the wheel and Intellectual Farce frisking in the lead, is one of which even more practised whips have fought shy. Wilde knew better than to attempt it: to swop single horses in the middle of a play was risk enough for him. Three of his comedies he wrote

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in relays, always happy to relinquish the reins of Sentiment to snatch at those of Paradox. His one perfect comedy, The Importance of Being Earnest, was accomplished in a single stage. The Young Idea has something of the quality of Wilde's best play, with this difference, that more than half the characters are supposed to be perfectly real creatures. I suggest that at the end of the second act the play is moving on no less than four planes at once. Cicely-who is very carefully drawn-and her lover are going off together, as very reasonably they may be expected to do: Puck and his sister are peering upon the mischief which it is not reasonably probable that they could have brought about; their father stands halting between the world of the rational and of the irrational; while there is some irrelevant fun at the expense of a minor personage. The situation is not net; it is serious, impish, and satirical all at once. Now the best and most single-hearted laughter occurs when something happens which is "irresistibly" comic. You laugh "without knowing why," and without wanting to know why. But if you were to analyse that something you would probably discover a unity of drollery. You laugh whole-heartedly when Grock toboggans down the lid of the piano; you would laugh less freely if his partner were at the same time doing something funny with his fiddle. At the climax of Mr. Coward's play there is thrust and pull, stress both sheer and tangential. Whence the effect is not irresistibly, but resistingly, comic.

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Mr. Coward is not only witty, but is also clever at covering up his wit. "I did not drive you into your lover's arms," says Brent. "Why should I? You were trotting there quite comfortably of your own accord." "You use banter to conceal your lack of courage," retorts Cicely. Now this is very neat cover. Brent's remark, we had felt, did not proceed out of the situation, but purely out of the author's inability to resist a, for the nonce, rather poor joke. Banter being conceded, our objection fades away and we are floated over to the next consideration, that of George's courage. There are some excellent flashes, like "I lent that woman the top of my Thermos flask, and she never returned it. She's shallow, that's what she is. Shallow!" Mr. Coward has spun this play out of his own wit and entrails, but hardly out of human nature. If he will only be content to observe a little more, and give observation back in his own way, he bids fair to become an admirable successor to Hubert Henry Davies and Harold Chapin. I look to him not for "heart interest" but for the gentle castigation of manners. Let Mr. Coward go on to give us closely observed people babbling of matters of general interest and not, sempiternally, of their green passions. It was an immense relief to realise that Sholto and Gerda could not be lovers.

Miss Muriel Pope plays the odious Cicely with the nicest discrimination, Mr. Herbert Marshall the difficult, non-committal husband in an engaging non-committal way. As Gerda, Miss Ann Trevor

shows as certain a touch in glittering comedy as she did recently in the lachrymose. As Sholto, Mr. Coward gives an admirable performance of—Mr. Coward. I am tired of praising Miss Kate Cutler. "Darling," she says to her husband returning after fifteen years, "you should have given me notice, and I would have put a lamp in the window!" Miss Cutler handles lines like this with extraordinary deftness and precision. She has the finest feeling for the parodying of sentimental enormity. As Penelope, however, she is quite unthinkable; and she knows it.

February 17.

"Anna Christie"

A PLAY BY EUGENE O'NEILL

STRAND THEATRE

THIS American play turns out, on reflection, to be a mighty queer jumble—Conrad and Synge and Dumas fils and Huysmans, and whoever writes the scenarios for little Lilian Gish. But the whole business of the playwright is to banish reflection, or at least to keep us unreflecting till we get home. "Story first" is his motto, or should be. Anna Christie is a fine play because of its inherent quality of simple emotion. If Anna had not been taken to her lover's arms at the end, I believe that every member of that crowded audience would have left the theatre in genuine distress. Happy endings are not necessarily bad art. This play called for a happy ending, though perhaps not in the particular manner devised by Mr. O'Neill. Mr. Hardy sees the futility of some tragedies when he says of his hapless heroine: "'Iustice' was done, and the President of the Immortals (in Æschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess." But that same President ends his sport when a child is run over; and if Anna had been destroyed, I repeat that we should have left the

theatre with the sense of travestied justice and wanton injury. Consent to tragedy is only rightly wrung from us when the tragedy is inevitable and serves as a warning. There is nothing tragic in a street accident, there is only horror; and for little Anna to have ended miserably would have been horrific.

The theme of Anna Christie is an inversion of that old French thing, the repentant courtesan. Every modern playwright since Augier and Dumas fils has had his whack at it, so that it comes into twentiethcentury drama like a tin can kicked down the street by a parcel of vigorous schoolboys, and bearing the dints made by individual legs. Indeed, the earliest form of this type of play has been likened to a wateringcan with which that good husbandman, the dramatist, douses those Colorado beetles, the adventuresses, pours upon them the caustic solution of morality, "and so keeps them away from the crops." Augier and Dumas pointed out that if beetles would insist upon being beetles, they must learn what to expect: their most lenient punishment was to be allowed to crawl on to a Louis Seize sofa and curl up in a romantic atmosphere of repentance and consumption. Two or more generations have played the gardener, diluting the solution now with comprehension, now with pity. Lastly, Mr. O'Neill turns up with a story, not of green-fly, but of some pathetic rose. He uses a new milieu, a new setting, and something that looks like a new technique to tell us an old and moving tale.

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When Anna was a child she was sent by her fathera drunken sailor obsessed with the fear of the sea, a Conrad will-o'-the-wisp, this-to earn her living on a farm inland, out of the sea's way. Enslaved and seduced, she fled to the town, and of necessity took to the streets. The brothel, prison, and hospital followed; and when the play opens Anna returns to the old sailor who for fifteen years has trusted to her bogus accounts of well-being. At her first entry we know Anna's past; we know her life of want, misery, and simulated gaiety, of lies and pretended passion. Every big town knows the type. As she sits drinking at the inn-table she might be the younger of Huysmans's sisters Vatard. But we know from the actress's face that Anna is no essential prostitute; we do not need her off-hand remark to another drab-"Gee, I hate them, every mother's son; don't you?" -to make us aware of her essential disgust at her way of life. Probably there was not a father in the audience who would not at sight have entrusted his daughter to Anna's care. She was, you felt, as innocent of that outrage at the farm, and all that followed, as the heroine of Way Down East was innocent of her misfortunes. Anna fills you with the same simple emotion that you know when Lilian Gish turns away from the farmstead and begins to trudge up that long, dreary road. There is no question of the Immortals treating these poor women badly, either for their punishment or our purgation. When Anna meets her honest sailor-lover she refuses him in the

self-sacrificing Dumasian way. Her lips tremble, and frame themselves to yet another version of the old: "Ainsi, quoi qu'elle fasse, la créature tombée ne se relèvera jamais. Dieu lui pardonnera peutêtre, mais le monde sera inflexible," etc. etc. In her father's presence Anna blurts out the truth; the lover calls her a strumpet and threatens to beat her brains out with a chair; Anna defies him and reels off the age-long indictment of man's lust. For some time the ghosts of other dramatists have seemed to beckon from the wings. First Pinero, proposing that Anna shall marry the sailor and then that some common crony shall cross their path. Then Mr. Galsworthy, suggesting that the chair must be brought down, that the father must shoot the lover, and the President of the Immortals, in the person of a kindly, white-haired old judge, end his sport with all three. What actually does happen is that both men go off to get drunk, the lover casting Anna back upon the streets, the father promising to shelter her in spite of the past. And, of course, within two days the lover creeps back. Mr. O'Neill's difficulty was to decide upon the exact method of his happy ending. The girl's purity and innocence are so fully established, our sympathies have been so acutely aroused in circumstances which defy avoidance by circumspection, that tragedy can have no useful meaning. On a plane with the rest of the play would have been a frank facing and acceptance of the facts. Instead, the lovers agree to pretend that the new Anna is no longer the

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old Anna. Whereas, of course, she has not changed. Of course, if the girl had been a courtesan at heart, then the real play begins where this one ends, and tragedy sets in. But that way Ibsen lies. It appears that in America Mr. O'Neill despaired of persuading his public that soilure of the body is not necessarily impurity of the mind, and that he had to insist upon a new Anna. Over here the applause after the first three acts was tremendous, and slight after the fourth, although the happy ending has been conceded. The audience had become inured to the truth about this particular case, and seemed to resent the concluding falsity. All the more because the play, which had boomed with quite irrelevant echoes of Conrad, now tailed off with some perverted Synge. But threefourths of it had been immensely fine.

Before hailing Miss Pauline Lord as a definitely great actress, I think I want to see her in some other part or parts. Her Anna is certainly an exquisite performance. Only a highly accomplished artist could have given that suggestion of childlikeness and canaillerie, of maiden virtue rudely strumpeted, of a loving heart, and the stare of the streets. Plain, if you like, slight, undistinguished, the actress gave you at her first entrance that indefinable sense of trouble which marks the great players; and she has the gift of melancholy. Her face, in repose, can show the ravages of past storms. When Duse played Marguerite Gauthier she received Armand's love, Lemaître tells us, with a gesture of religious ecstasy quite outside

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Dumas's imagining. Whether Mr. O'Neill intended it or not, this Anna made a sacrificial offering of the sailor's wooing. Her hard yet frightened assurance, her vehemence when in her scene of passion she allowed the street to come to the surface, her pathos and even her queer fun were alike admirable. And the gesture of humility with which, at the end, she abased her head before her lover was one of the most beautiful I have ever seen. Mr. George Marion as the father was magnificent, and Mr. Frank Shannon only a little less good.

April 21.

"R.U.R."

A PLAY BY KAREL CAPEK

St. Martin's Theatre

R. U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots) is described by its Czech author as a "fantastic melodrama." It is not a masterpiece nor, except for three minutes towards the end of the third act where the human beings awaiting annihilation consider what it is that has got them into the mess, does it ever look like a masterpiece. The melodrama is curiously botched; the fantasy has neither head, tail, nor identifiable middle; yet the whole makes up a fine play.

When the curtain goes up we find Harry Domain, the General Manager of Rossum's Universal Robots, dictating to a typist paragraphs at least two and a half times as long as any young woman could grasp. This is because she is not a human being, but a mechanical contrivance. Her inventor, now dead, has left a formula whereby she and the male of her kind can be turned out by the million. The efficiency of the Robot being two and a half times greater than that of Man, his cost of upkeep ten times less and his initial cost £25, less, presumably, $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. spot

cash, it follows that all over the world employers of labour are dismissing humans and taking on machines. The crux of the question is this: What will mankind make of an invention which, ex hypothesi, does away with human labour? Will man, who has hitherto eaten bread in the sweat of his brow, eat it, so soon as wealth can be artificially created, in the lubricating oil of these enriching machines? The answer is to be found in that old anomaly, the pies in the cookshop window and the nosing urchins, the shoeless and the strings of shoes hanging in the bootmaker's doorway. Put on one side a belief that such an invention reducing mankind to lotus-eaters would be an inestimable curse; concede it in the abstract to be a boon. Either way-and Capek obviously holds the former viewhumanity, being what it is, must destroy itself before the event is determined. The burden of a musichall song comes to mind here:

The rich get rich And the poor get—children.

We know that a shower of Robots, however universally intended, would in the first instance result in the rich getting richer and the poor poorer. It is immaterial whether the rich were the orderly capitalists of tradition or the new-fangled, ungovernable scum. The Stadium, so to speak, would be overwhelmed before the common sense of the world's peoples, which is its ultimate police, could come to its rescue. Capek sees half of this, and imagines the governments of

Europe ordering millions of Robots with which to make war upon one another. But the greater probability is that there would be no governments left, that those who must at first become unemployed and destitute millions would have precipitantly destroyed them.

That Capek has seized upon the military, and neglected the economic, problem shows that he has mastered only half his subject. First he makes his Robots not only in the image of man, but of man and woman, the excuse for the irrelevant ornament of sex being that people prefer pretty housemaids and female typists to batmen and orderly-room clerks. Next he introduces a silly woman and a love-interest. Helena Glory cannot grasp that the Robots are machines, that they are inanimate and non-individual, that they can be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, that just as they are never born so they go back to the stampingmill without reluctance. She cannot understand that they do not feel the need for love. Helena, in short, is a fool. She marries the General Manager, and then inveigles the Head Chemist, who is in love with her, secretly to tinker the Robot formula so as to "humanise" the machines. (Before this the Company has found it necessary to endow its creatures with nerve-centres and pain-nerves, so that they may not damage themselves through carelessness, and cause the Company loss.) At the beginning of the second act, ten years after the first, the alteration in the formula has worked. Robots all over the world

have become not human, but superhuman; they out number man. They can do all except reproduce their kind, the formula for which is locked up in Maitland's safe. For some undiscovered reason human births have ceased. This stirs Helena-moved, we feel sure, less by the unpeopling of the world than by thoughts of all the little dears unborn-pettishly to steal and burn the formula. They shan't make any more nasty Robots! In the third act communication with Europe has ceased; then news comes that the Robots have risen and destroyed "man the parasite." (Will not Moscow confess a touch here?) Only our four or five humans remain. They plan to buy escape by bribing the Robots with a faked copy of the formula suppressing essentials, or, alternatively, with the Company's profits for the half-year. Then, in Juan Fernandez, or elsewhere, they propose to start the human race again. If Helena had not destroyed the formula, they could have made millions of obedient Robots (old pattern) to destroy the mutineers. Alas, they cannot remember it, and must begin humanity again and wait for the Robots (normal longevity twenty years) to die. But the Robots, refusing to be bribed, kill the humans with the exception of the Master Carpenter. The fourth act sees this old man divided between his retorts and the Book of Genesis. trying in vain to discover how Robots may propagate. And then, in the manner of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Love is Born. A Robot is drawn to his Robotess, the distraught old man dies, a pink light floods the stage, the machines decently withdraw, musique de Massenet, discreet rapture, and curtain! A new Race, two and a half times stronger than Man, has begun, which is obviously an excellent thing. But since the author set out to prove the opposite, it is also a reductio ad absurdum.

The bones of the play, then, are nonsense; but as entertainment and also as mental stimulus, if only to find out what is wrong, R.U.R. is magnificent. The Robots themselves are immensely impressive, and we do feel that Life and Death are being considered elementally, and not with the mawkish curiosity which likes to "go upstairs and see the body." There are three fine things in the play—the tremendous jibe at that sense of property which insists upon pain nerves, the Chief Robot's acquiescence in dissection for the good of his kind, and the last-hour confab of the humans. "I didn't do it for their beastly dividends," cries Domain; "I did it because it was a grand invention." The recognition that work done to man's own honour and glory may bring about man's wreckage is pure Ibsen. This play is more than a gesture of annoyance at listening-in sets and other "improvements"; but Capek should write it all over again and eliminate his silly woman. It was magnificently played by all the Robots, and terrifyingly by their leader, Mr. Leslie Banks, all but his voice, which was too high-pitched and sounded squeaky. Mr. Basil Rathbone did very pleasantly and manfully; Mr. Clifford Mollison almost spoiled a finely ironical

performance by a too hysterical exit; Mr. C. V. France was perfect; Mr. Brember Wills was admirable in his collected moments, less good in his shambling depiction of the Last of his Race, as Bulwer would most certainly not have drawn him, and as Mr Shaw conceivably might. And when the old man jumped out of his chair to make his grand denunciation, he did it so suddenly that I thought the cat had bitten him. Miss Ada King, Manchester's best product, earnest as some infuriated mouse, very nearly played everybody else off the stage. Miss Frances Carson exuded sentimentality and an irritating amount of charm, but it was not her fault that one wanted Helena cut out of the play. For the setting, nothing but the highest praise. The formalised models pretending to be "scenery" were exactly right, and the Schwabe-Hasait system of lighting and a projected background, though a little unsteady, gave a good account of itself. But wouldn't the background change better by dissolving? At present it shuts off and begins again like an oldfashioned lantern slide. The massed symbolical grouping of the Robot quartet in the last act approached genius. No one should miss this most interesting play.

May 5.

"The Insect Play"

BY THE BROTHERS CAPEK

REGENT THEATRE

THE Insect Play is by the author of R.U.R., plus a brother who, the paragraphists assure us, is more concerned with costume, scenery, lighting, elucidatory music-that which the old-fashioned used to call the mise-en-scène. In this case the trappings do more than eke out the play; they fulfil it. There were a good many moments when, the Capeks having come to the end of their words, the tale was taken up by Mr. Frederick Austin and better told. Not because the musician is a better artist than the two playwrights, but simply because music has greater subtlety and more poignant significance than an arrangement in words. This is not the place to split hairs, and I do not mean that a poem by Shelley may not be as highly charged with emotion as a symphony by Beethoven. But when you come to the middling masters, second-raters like Austin and the Capeks, it is the musician who has the emotional pull. "Secondraters" connotes immensely high praise, meaning the highest class but one, and perhaps I should modify to "third-raters." Words are really very trouble-

some things. What I am trying to say is that the Capeks and Mr. Austin have devised between them a beautiful thing with some exquisite moments. But Mr. Playfair very nearly ruined the piece by the way in which he produced the first act.

I take it that production includes casting, and this was deplorable here. The butterflies had the gestures, and their voices the timbre of tea-shop waitresses "mashing" their beaux. The chief enchantress was presented not even as "the lady," but as an illmannered little minx, whose tones must have grated upon the least fastidious ear. If, on scanning my programme during the first interval, I had re-encountered these first-act names, I must have fled the theatre. In view of the later scenes, it is difficult to believe that this act is irretrievably "common." Played otherwise, this disqualification might disappear. There was one performance of delightful vulgarity in the second act—Miss Elsa Lanchester's Larva. Here the assumption was wilful, and the actress deserved great praise. One felt that if the little beast had been human she must have grown into one of those pert hobbledehoys which Mr. Ian Hay inserts into his boarding-house comedies for clever Miss Ena Grossmith to simulate. Miss Lanchester's pastiche of Miss Grossmith was every whit as skilful as those "slight impressions" of which the musichall impersonator is so lavish. Larva's father. Ichneumon Fly, was done really magnificently by Mr. Ivan Berlyn. Fly was loathsome, as he was meant

to be, but he was a pet aversion made tolerable by the actor's humour and the gusto with which he abounded in his own sense. To Fly is given the most wearisome characteristic of the big store proprietor or successful newsmonger—the unending passion for mouthing the secrets of success. "Ah, my boy, that's what you want-brains, expert knowledge. enterprise, imagination, initiative—and love of work. let me tell you. Life is real, life is earnest. . . . The daily round, the common task . . ." Mr. Berlyn reproduced the authors of that shilling booklet-My Pile and How I Made It-to perfection, and his every exit was followed by applause. Parasite—Mr. Claude Rains-was good, too. "Comrade" is for ever on Parasite's lips. Parasite complains that there is no equality, that storing should be done away with. Down with larders! Eat your fill and have done with it! Parasite resents his own inefficiency. Even if he had the energy to look for something to kill he couldn't eat it, at least not satisfactorily. His jaw is too weak, he can't chew properly, and so on. It would seem that the Hyde Park agitator is the Hyde Park agitator all the world over, including Czecho-Slovakia. In the end Parasite gobbles up Larva for whom Fly had destroyed Mr. and Mrs. Cricket, pathetically played with quite a La Fontaine touch by Mr. Andrew Leigh and Miss Angela Baddeley. Mrs. Beetle, by Miss Maire O'Neill, was a fine grotesque.

The third act is the interior of an ant-heap.

ought to have said that the play is accompanied by a running commentary from a Tramp, who is our friend Christopher Sly all over again. The Tramp is a philosopher: he despises equally the butterfly and the grubbing, selfish beetle, shiftless Parasite and predatory Fly. Man is different, man has ideals and dreams and family love. Man has the co-operative sense. Dulce et decorum est, etc. And then we see the Ants consenting that their lives shall be given for the Ant State. The whole of this act is full of gall. We see the little creatures at work, joyless as convicts and significantly garbed. The antdrivers, with a confusion of thought which is purely human, claim that Speed is the master of Time, and so speed up the workers to the limit of ant-endurance. Their leaders predict war, because they have discovered a new war-machine. They need that bit of the world from the Birch tree to the Pine tree, and demand an outlet between two blades of grass. The Yellow Ants dispute this. Questions of prestige, trade, the rights of nationality are raised. The Great War occurs in microcosm. The Yellows win, and their Leader proclaims himself Ruler of the Universe.

> It makes yer think o' them ole scenes, With star-shells over'ead, The night we left a thousan' dead And keptured two latrines,

muses the Tramp, and kicks over the ant-heap. There is a nerve-racking, rhythmic persistence about this scene which is admirable.

"The Insect Play"

But the play would be much less good than it is if it were no more than the satire which I have indicated. The authors have seized, and found a wonderful image for, the mystery which is behind both man and insect. At one side of the stage, immured in its husk like a mummy in its case, is a Chrysalis. This little being is full of the ecstasy of birth. "The whole world is bursting into blossom," says Chrysalis, with profound egotism. "I am being born." "How much?" asks the Tramp. "The Great Adventure begins." answers Chrysalis. "Right oh!" replies the Tramp, and settles down to sleep again. Throughout three acts, like some patient Chorus, Chrysalis reaffirms her ecstasy, bidding the Universe prepare and Space expand. In half a minute something immense, unbounded is to happen. Her wings are growing: they are to spread beyond the suns. The Tramp is sympathetic, and when Chrysalis declares her coming greatness, asks, "What jer call great?" "To be born, to live!" "All right, little Chrysalis-I won't desert yer," he says comfortingly. And then, at last, Chrysalis is "reely born." She becomes a Moth and whirls into the light. She will proclaim a mystery and solve all things. She will tell the world's meaning. . . . A few late, lingering Mayflies promise her life eternal. She falls dead. "You 'ad sich 'opes," says the Tramp, and wonders what she was going to say. "They don't seem skeered o' death, these little mites don't. Life's a rapture to them, and death's a rapture. It's queer." All this is the purest poetry. 181

It is succeeded by a very human little coda. Mr. Edmund Willard was quite definitely, if unobtrusively, good as the Tramp, while Miss Joan Maude contrived, as Chrysalis, to be extraordinarily touching. Remember that she was allowed to show no movement and only the tiniest of faces. The whole emotion had therefore to be conveyed by the voice alone. There was a piping quality of innocence in this young actress's tones which the oboe might have envied, and it was left to Mr. Austin's admirable music to complete that which was humanly and exquisitely begun. Scenery, lighting, and dresses were admirable, but it was a pity to begin the evening with a night-mare.

May 12.

"Robert E. Lee"

A HISTORY BY JOHN DRINKWATER

REGENT THEATRE

HETHER we are impassioned by the chronicleform or not, a new work by Mr. Drinkwater
is a great event, the show of a fine mind in noble
poise. I take *Robert E. Lee* to be this writer's best
play, judged by the standard of performance in the
theatre. And this for three reasons.

First, because its "message" is both good and clear. Now I am not one of those who look upon a dramatist as a kind of moral postman with a bagful of letters addressed to our best selves. But if a dramatist must knock at our moral consciousness, then at least he should do so both intelligibly and inspiringly. The message of Robert E. Lee is that nations must use defeat as a stepping-stone to something higher than that for which they fought. "Virginia!" cries that local patriot, Lee, at the end of the first act: "America!" he breathes at the end. And David, the poet-volunteer who acts throughout as chorus, expands this. To a comrade desiring to know what, after defeat, remains, he replies, "There will be graves—and a story—and America!" Mr. Claude

Rains said this with the ecstasy of the preacher proclaiming a gospel above love of country, and so raised emotion to the plane of the universal. When this play comes to be acted in Berlin the word in the actor's mouth will be "America"; that ringing in the ears of the audience will be "Germany." And rightly. From this to "Humanity" is only a step.

My second reason for preferring this play is that it does no violence to known fact. Perhaps Lee is a trifle sententious. Perhaps he and Lincoln wear too much the air of an American Romulus and Remus suckled by the same motherly sheep. Be that as it may, one felt that one was in the presence of Lee himself, and not of some mislabelled, poetic figment. Third reason. Except for the long pow-wow between Lee and Jefferson Davis the play is theatrically effective, holding not only the mind but also the eye and ear, arousing expectation and satisfying it in such way that from satisfaction spring fresh demands.

Nevertheless, I have little doubt that the play will be pronounced "undramatic" and lacking in "development of character." Surely this is to use words as masters instead of slaves? If "drama" cannot be stretched to cover Mr. Drinkwater's spiritual progressions then we must discard it for a word that will. For that "development" which consists in exposing character bit by bit—first a hand and then a foot, next an elbow and now the tip of an ear—I have the

same kind of admiration as for the art of the cheapjack displaying his table in a doorway and withdrawing it inch by inch until he has filled his shop with a literally nose-led crowd. I do not bewail Mr. Drinkwater's short measure in minor virtuosity. As for "evolution of character," there was nothing in Lee to evolve. You remember what a relief it was when the longueurs of Abraham Lincoln were broken up by that incident of the sleeping sentry? This play has plenty of this kind of material shock. Soldiers fall thick, and in the hail of bullets Lee will not budge. There are heroisms after the manner of "Sapper," and dyings à la Ian Hay. Yet, in spite of these, the play moves symphonically, full of contrasted yet inwardly related movements. It maintains throughout a spiritual whole, co-ordinating the allegro of Lee's independence, the adagio of his farewell, the scherzo in the woods which is the young men's joy of war, and the grave, liturgical close.

The scenery was as simple as the toilette of a perfectly dressed woman, and as ruinously expensive in time. Darkened waits of ten minutes between scenes simply won't do, and Mr. Playfair might be well advised to retain his expressive outdoor scenes and formalise his interiors. Declamation was something in the air; and even Lee so far played the conscious hero as to act his letter of surrender to his typist instead of dictating it. And that, as all authors know, is a pure waste of emotion. Individually, the actors were very, very good. Mr. Felix Aylmer's Lee, though

noble and austere, was a little soft, just a little reminiscent of the Vicar of Wakefield, though, probably, given the text, he could not have been otherwise. Mr. Gordon Harker extricated himself with dignity from the appalling futilities of Jefferson Davis. Mr. Edmund Willard, as "Stonewall" Jackson, made fine use of his glorious voice and aptness for berserk fury; Mr. Harvey Adams, as Colonel Hewitt, died as became a soldier. And there were two pieces of acting which filled me with the greatest admiration—the David Peel of Mr. Claude Rains and the Ray Warrenton of Mr. Harold Anstruther. Mr. Rains showed authentic passion, pathos, and feeling for beauty. Mr. Anstruther was exquisite by implication, his broken soldier speaking, through his very silences, for our dumb fields in France.

June 24.

"Melloney Holtspur"

A FANTASY BY JOHN MASEFIELD

St. MARTIN'S THEATRE

THE trouble with the English theatre is that, with a few brilliant exceptions, those who have mastered its expression have nothing to express. Conversely, again with a few exceptions, our writers with something to say make the mistake of condescending to the theatre, and, under the plea of writing down, write badly. Mr. Masefield's Melloney Holtspur, though it is the product of a distinguished mind, is a bad play. It is lugubrious, it is morbid, and it is unending in the garrulous way of intellectuals. When Melloney said, "At last the night is drawing to a close," you reflected that more immediate comfort lay in the hint that this particular afternoon was coming to an end.

In the beginning an old housekeeper of eighty and a housemaid of sixty discuss interminably the awful "goings-on" which take place every evening in the hall of the Holtspurs' country house. Mr. Puff, and Mr. Puff only, could explain why these secret, grey, and midnight crones find it necessary to debate above stairs what they must have thrashed out in

the servants' hall a hundred times. Ultimately, to the accompaniment of green lighting and green music, the ghost of Melloney Holtspur, who died twenty years ago, glides in. She is seeking the spook of Lonny Copshrews, a dissolute artist who, in life, had seduced two kitchen wenches, married a French hussy, and trifled with poor Melloney's young affections. The ghost fades out, and the play indulges in a "throw-back" to the real Melloney. And now we see Lonny, his mistresses, and shrewish wife, who show us how they behaved twenty years ago. Lonny sets up an elaborate, rhetorical, and unconvincing defence of the artist as gay Lothario. Spouting Byron he rushes off to the Isles of Greece.

Five things contributed to make the play theatrically effective up to this point. First, the tremendous significance of Miss Ada King's every word and gesture. Those of us who have seen this actress's Mrs. Jones in The Silver Box know that here is an artist of the first magnitude. Second, Miss Mary Jerrold's presentment of the translucence of old age. Third, the spirituality and grave beauty of Miss Laura Cowie. This lady is not easily cast, but in this play she was most admirably suited. Fourth, the emotional power of Mr. Esmé Percy, who chooses to hide his shining light under the bushel of unfamiliar initials. Mr. Percy treats his part like a piece of handsome decoration, a theme for body as well as mind, a score for voice and temperament. The long love duet with Miss Cowie was magnificently done by both players.

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Fifth, the "intriguing" use of phosphorescent paint, which made the ghosts look not in the least like wraiths of their best, worst, or middling selves, but like something uncoffin'd. There was fascination here, the unlawful fascination of exhumation at the instigation of the police, with the Home Office analyst hovering in the background.

And then the play went to pieces, actually and metaphysically. It was concerned with the woes of Melloney's sister's son and Lonny's daughter, who wanted to marry, and couldn't, because of their ancestors. Frankly, these young people were less interesting than their ghostly forbears. Miss Meggie Albanesi was very bright and bustling. Mr. Ian Hunter, a capital young actor, had to grapple with the name of "Bunny," and a sensitiveness to ghostly presence which made him declare that he had been feeling low ever since the Hunt Ball. Mr. Masefield mixes his worlds too freely. Then there was a melodramatic sub-plot, which involved stolen jewels and a horde of romping children.

Now, whenever I see children's names on a theatre programme I give myself up for lost. I know that they will have been trained to the last inflection by Miss Italia Conti, that they will be marvels of sweetness and light. And the more precocious they are the less illusion do I get. On that sweltering afternoon I sympathised enormously with little Misses Betty Hearn, Gabrielle Casartelli, Mimi Charpentier, and also with little Master Neil O'Brien. I marvelled at

their cleverness, and thought how much happier they would have been paddling in the Serpentine. And it never occurred to me that they were Jemima, Susan, Maria, and Peter Jones. One little tot held an entirely friendly conversation with an apparition who would, in fact, have caused each several hair in those golden curls to stand on end, and have sent the child shrieking to the nursery.

But the metaphysical trouble was more serious. It is a sufficiently morbid idea that Bunny Mento mustn't marry Lenda Copshrews because, her father being a scoundrel, she must logically be a minx. But Mr. Masefield goes further. Not only does the evil of his old ghosts live after them in their descendants' minds, but they (the ghosts) must come back from beyond the grave to resume on this side their jealousies and hates. This is untenable. Lonny himself is peculiarly unhappy. The Man in Armour, who is spokesman for the Deity, tells him that he has no power of repentance or atonement, but only that of eternal suffering. But "eternal" doesn't mean for ever and ever, but only until Melloney has had her fill of hate. I was really shocked at Mr. Masefield's conception of the Hereafter, which was like one of Calvin's nightmares with a dash of feminine spite.

What do these ghosts mean by talking of twenty years as a "long time"? In what terms, then, must they think of eternity? And why does Lady Mento, whose objection to her son's marriage is utterly unreasonable, say of the boy's revolt: "When we

"Melloney Holtspur"

lay them in the cradle for the first time we know that one day this will happen." It won't, unless the mother chooses to behave like a fool. But the play contains a great deal of muddled thinking. The artist was damned to eternal torment for flirting with Melloney. But on Mr. Masefield's own showing he made two women radiantly happy by "betraying" them. Has the Recording Angel no credit side to his ledger? Coleridge said that poetry must begin by being sense. Let me say further that poetry in the theatre must also end by being sense. A lot of this play sounded strangely like nonsense, and to call it a "fantasy" is no excuse. Being the work of a fine mind, the play contained many noble lines, and none that was ignoble. But it was terrifyingly lacking in a sense of humour. I didn't believe in the spooks after the first ten minutes, or that the ghost of Lonny, who was a very presentable young man in the flesh, would have come to look so exactly like the shade of Nero trying to creep back to respectability in weeds stolen from Queen Victoria.

July 15.

"The Outsider"

A PLAY BY DOROTHY BRANDON

St. James's Theatre

WHEN a play reaches its three-hundredth performance, or is transferred to another theatre, it is customary for the critics to give it a fresh fillip. The Outsider is still short of its century, and there is at the moment no question of another home. I happen to have seen this play for the first time on Monday evening last, and, having been very much impressed with it, venture to come forward with an entirely unsolicited testimonial.

Of course, the play has faults. Miss Brandon's doctors do not possess the wit with which Mr. Shaw endowed that faculty, nor is their dilemma so formidable. In so far as The Outsider is a debate about medical trades-unionism, it is not enthralling. We do not believe the College of Surgeons to be composed of blatant and mouthing lunatics; nor is there any reason why the self-styled charlatan should have refused to walk the hospitals. Half-way through the last act Miss Brandon has run her play into the blindest possible cul-de-sac; there isn't any way out, and the end is not easily distinguishable from nonsense.

But these things are nothing in comparison with the play's humanity, understanding, and pity. Miss Brandon, in writing out of the fullness of her heart and mind, has utilised every ounce of her mental and spiritual energy. She has realised that woman is the complement of man, and not a figure in one of those sentimental "keepsakes" which Emma Bovary perused at school. Miss Elsom's Lalage Sturdee is, to look at, very exactly one of those "ladies anglaises à boucles blondes qui, sous leur chapeau de paille rond, vous regardent avec leurs grands yeux clairs." This Lalage, like Emma, glimpses "l'attirante fantasmagorie des réalités sentimentales." But, whereas Emma's frenzies are morbid, Lalage's are natural; and it is a proper thing that she should desire that healing which should enable her to take her woman's place in the world.

Many things are said in this play which show a reverence for nature to shock none but the vulgar mind. The whole of the second act is a paraphrase into Samuel Butler of all that Juliet whispers on the balcony. And if the insistence upon sex is a trifle overdone, it must be looked upon as a backwash of that surge of emotion which went to the play's creation. The theme is one after Ibsen's own heart. He, we may be sure, would have held that battle ending in disaster is better than a folding of the hands in resignation. Perhaps he would not have bored even so small a hole in the bag's end and let in Miss Brandon's ray of hope; probably he would have left everybody

profoundly miserable, and chuckled grimly over some such title as "The Lame Duck."

À propos, does Miss Brandon know the story of the family practitioner who called in a specialist to a patient? The great man pronounced sentence of immediate doom. A year later the physician, meeting the specialist in the street, told him that he had just returned from a luncheon party held to celebrate the patient's complete recovery. "You must have given him the wrong treatment!" said the great man, icily.

Let me admit frankly that it has taken me some time to like Miss Elsom's acting. Notwithstanding Miss Marie Tempest and Miss Gladys Cooper, musical comedy is a school from which I find it difficult to believe that good, serious acting can come. have no doubt whatever that Lalage is a fine performance, completely sincere, natural, and almost moving. Pathos may come. It is also amazingly inventive and varied, and I would ask the student of acting to note the accent and gestures which this young artist suits to three simple sentences—"Fetch the photos," "Show him in," and "I've got mother's money." Miss Elsom utters these with a natural stress, and not with the factitious emphasis of the leading lady. Mr. Faber's performance, too, is very fine, and I cannot see that Mr. Dawson-Milward in this part is anything but perfect. This is most emphatically a play to be seen.

"The Elopement"

A COMEDY BY ARTHUR WIMPERIS (From the French of Armont and Gerbidon)

COMEDY THEATRE

OMING out of the Comedy Theatre on Tuesday evening, I heard a woman say: "And I did so want to stay at home to-night and do some washing and mending!" The implied criticism was just. I have seldom seen a play which has stood in such need of both operations. To let down lightly the feeble and the unpretentious may be the better part of critical discretion; to come down like the proverbial ton of bricks upon the nasty and the insincere is not critical valour, but just plain duty.

The Elopement belongs to the category of plays which a great dramatist has styled "unpleasant"; its theme is a daughter's sacrifice on behalf of her mother's honour. To lay down boundaries of sacrifice is not my purpose. It is not enough to say that they will correspond to the power and passion of the playwright; they must march also with the intensity of his personages, with his ultimate seriousness and theirs. If this theme is to be tolerable we must be satisfied

about many things—that it is honour which is concerned and not mere reputation; that the sacrifice is worth while, which means that the mother must be made a creature worth saving; that it must be a sacrifice to be respected, which means that the daughter must, as Henry James would have said, "matter"; that the "situation" must be credible, which means that no lesser lengths would have done.

These issues are tolerable for just so long as they are real issues. How fine a play they can then amount to, those who remember the Goncourts' Henriette Maréchal will know. What a playwright must not do with an "unpleasant" theme is to burke it. In The Elopement, MM. Armont and Gerbidon are not concerned with either honour or sacrifice—all they are up to is to devise circumstances in which an innocent young girl may pose as a designing hussy. They throw, so to speak, a mackerel to catch a sprat.

Let it be admitted that truth is relative, like everything else, that obviously we must not expect to find that lady at Biarritz, in a French comedy, wearing an English face. The trouble is that in this play I do not recognise her in any of her masks. The things which happen are simply not credible. Madame Martin is about to yield to the importunacies of a young blackguard. Is she a light woman or merely bored by a dull husband? We do not know. All we know for certain is that she is not shaken by genuine passion. M. Martin discusses with Simone the chances of her mother remaining "honest." This

is not credible; one knows of neither beau nor vilain monde in which this could happen. Simone talks it over first with her mother and then with her nurse. Nurse has a simile about a mother-cat and a lost kitten which is equally an outrage upon natural history and good taste. I am not squeamish, but I desired to be somewhere else during this scene. Simone believes that if she can induce a certain roué to elope with her in his yacht the shock will keep her mother in the path of virtue.

And so we get the great scene of seduction. The roué is already living with a splendiferous demimondaine. Can Simone make him, in Angelo's words, "having waste ground enough, desire to raze the sanctuary?" This is the scène-a-faire, so beloved of Sarcey when it was sincere. But it is obvious to us that Simone is a cheat, that only a trifle of reputation is at stake, that even if her plan succeeds, she will ultimately call propriety to her aid. Also the roué sees through Simone's little game, and the act ends exactly where it would have begun if the little ninny had had the sense to ask him to pretend to elope with her, which was all that was needed. In other words, we have been dragged through the mire when there was a clean path staring us in the face. MM. Armont and Gerbidon have broken every one of the canons which we laid down as essential to the proper handling of an "unpleasant" theme. Neither mother nor daughter are seriously conceived; we feel that Mme. Martin's lapse from virtue has been merely

postponed, and that by an expedient of unnecessary violence. We have been invited, in short, to consider a serious theme in the light of a joke, which is a more heinous crime, dramatically speaking, than to use it as a peg for a sermon.

And what joking, and what style! My objection to this play is not only on the score of bad morality but also of dulness, cheapness, and futility. The dialogue is almost wholly boring. Sacha Guitry has broken our rules a score of times, and with impunity. But then Sacha is a conjurer, whose genius lies not so much in the trick to be performed as in the elegance of his patter. With him nimbleness of tongue, if you like, deceives the reason. Whereas I find it hard to believe that there can have been anything approaching Sacha's quality in MM. Armont and Gerbidon. Mr. Wimperis has proved too often not only that he is witty in himself, but also that he is the cause that wit would appear to be in foreign playwrights, for this to have been possible.

"Ignorance isn't purity," says the ingénue, citing a commonplace which must have been known to Madame de Sévigné. At which the roué exclaims, "There's a bit of clear thinking packed in a nutshell! I see I've been entertaining an angel unawares." Later he asks: "Why not give me the first fox-trot?" The reply is: "I can't. That's Justin's perks!" We gather that Simone means perquisites, and wonder at the poverty of modern wit. There is too much winding-up to be done at the end. Simone and the roué

have each to discard a lover so that they may fall into each other's arms. I spent the last twenty minutes wondering which goose was the most deluded—Madame Martin as to the power of her maternal instinct, Monsieur Martin as to his wife's restored affections, Simone about her power of sacrifice, the roué about his ability to discard his past. What a crew!

The play was brilliantly acted. Mr. Ronald Squire, as the rake, may be said to have held his part in the hollow of his hand-to have cuddled it under his chin as a virtuoso uses his fiddle. His ease, polish, and air of breeding were perfectly Hawtreyesque. Mr. John Astley's young blackguard was exactly like Willy's or Tristan Bernard's idea of a gentlemanly seducer. A capital impersonation. Mr. John Deverell's acting is rapidly becoming neither above nor beneath, but apart from, criticism. He has invented himself, and his scenario-writers have taken to moving him about like a piece of furniture. Credible in Milne, he is incredible in work of lesser verisimilitude and wit. His lover in this play is an inessential entertainment in one key, of which one tires towards the end. I do not think that it would be possible for Miss Helen Haye, that exceedingly clever actress, to give a bad performance. But it is possible to miscast her, and in this Mr. Vedrenne has succeeded. Two things mark this actress-her grave, dark beauty, and her sense of moral values. In the person of a flaxen featherbrain both qualities suffer temporary eclipse, though the accom-

plished technician makes as many amends as are possible. Miss Tonie Bruce, as the *déclassée*, gives a performance which is both gracious and flamboyant, and Miss Marie Ault contributes a clever character sketch.

Miss Edna Best, whose art is as English as a milk-pudding, did not waste pains in pretending to be French, but neither did anybody else. Frankly, her talent seems to me to be scarcely equal to bearing the whole burden of a play. Toujours perdrix is bad, but toujours milk-pudding is worse. There were two admirable, if inanimate, performances. One was given by M. Martin's collar, worn by Mr. Harben, of a portentousness invented by Max to adorn a noble lord, and an agent provocateur, if ever there was one, of wifely infidelity. The other was provided by the yacht, which got up steam and turned on her own axis within five seconds.

September 1.

"Ambush"

A PLAY BY ARTHUR RICHMAN

GARRICK THEATRE

I T has touches of Shaw—witness the harping on the material injury which ideals inflict upon their incautious entertainer; whilst ever and again you must hark back to the Houghton of Hindle Wakes and the Sudermann of Magda. But it is Ibsen who is Mr. Richman's forbear—old Ibsen who was once regarded as a realist and is now a poet and a dreamer. Yet the things which the old man said remain to be preached, like a gospel; and in the same way in which any gospel worth having is perpetuated and sustained, with the qualifications of increasing experience.

I suppose that if one wanted to put Ibsen in a nutshell one would use some such phrase as "Face facts" or "Dree your weird and be damned!" meaning thereby that only by fulfilling himself and following his fate wherever it leads can man be truly blessed. And by facts are meant not such illusions as that you cannot eat your cake and have it. Ibsen knew that the only real way of possessing your cake is to eat it.

What shall it profit a man if the soul which he has saved was never really his, but some pious sham? What shall it profit the wretched husband and father in this play that he has preserved his ideals at the cost of his family's happiness? Walter Nichols comes at the end to accept money at the hands of his daughter's lover, who is a married man. He realises that self-respect can be a form of selfishness, and he faces that outrageous fact.

Shall the daughter fulfil her wanton, vicious self? Shall she live a life of middling degradation? Shall her parents, by conniving at one liaison, avoid a dozen, and save her from the ultimate streets? Shall the roof be kept over these three distracted heads by the one man at whose hands all recognised codes forbid charity?

In the days before Ibsen the answer to these questions would have been two bullets—one for the daughter and the other for the father. But the morality which appealed to parents of the temper of Macaulay's Virginius was regarded by our old sage not as morality, but as a pitiful fobbing-off. Ibsen saw that to end a situation was not to mend it, and that you do not cure evils by refusing to endure them. The object of life, he said in effect, is living, not dying.

Thus Solness, toppled from his steeple, is less dead than the poltroon who should have been afraid to climb. At the end of *Ambush* the father is told that he must go on living. "Why—why—why?" he asks in agony. But that question takes us beyond

the bounds of human competence. "How—how—how?" has been throughout the more urgent and practicable consideration. This play refuses to be tidied up in any conventional way. These people are what they are, and we are to consider how best they may hit upon some working compromise with life.

Does this sound dull? Go and see it on the stage, magnificently acted down to the last gesture and intonation, to the most secret crannies of the mind. As is fitting in the theatre, the story is told with all proper excitement and suspense. First we see the pleasure-loving girl, cramped in her dull surroundings. She is truer to life than Magda, about whom, for propriety's sake, was cast the glamour of Art. Margaret does not deceive herself with any artistic blather; she wants "life," by which she means luxury in the old sense. Her first lover has betrayed her, she says, under promise of marriage. The father will forgive, his daughter will sin no more, the mother will remain in ignorance. This were pure Family Herald did we not feel that the girl is lying, that the mother is privy to her daughter's disgrace.

But the girl is not wholly vicious; she will not marry the man whom she has never regarded as a husband. She has compunctions and a kind of remorse. In other words, she is not a lay figure of evil, but a woman. Later, she has her second liaison, and when her father threatens to turn her into the street, expresses her entire willingness to go.

She then reveals an "affair," antecedent to the other

two, with a lover in humble life. If she goes, her mother will go with her. The father, a poor stick in all but his ideals, has come to ruin. If he accepts the help which Margaret's lover offers, it is possible that she may some day make some sort of marriage—a poor solution. But since any solution is better than none, he accepts.

It may be that this play does not sound moral. I can only say that morality, in the last resort, is an attitude of mind, and that high seriousness can never be immoral. This play shows that morality, as we know it, is not necessarily a universal key, that life has doors which it will not unlock. There are problems which do not admit of more than an approximate solution. Why?—we may ask with Nichols. You cannot divide ten by three. Why? I urge every playgoer who takes a decent interest in the theatre to see this play and form his own opinion of it. It should arouse a storm of controversy.

It was, I repeat, exquisitely acted. Miss Auriol Lee and Mr. George Elton were perfection as the mother and father; Miss Madeleine Marshall, whom I take to be American, played the daughter with perfect understanding and some pathos. Other extremely good pieces of acting were given by Messrs. James Carew, Charles Courtneidge, Frederick Keen, Robert Minster, and Cyril Sworder. The Theatre Guild, who present the play, have laid theatre-going London under a deep obligation.

September 1.

"Hassan"

A PLAY BY JAMES ELROY FLECKER

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE

ASSAN, in the theatre, is a fine play. We knew that it was poetry; now we know that it is at least handsome melodrama. None can have watched the ghosts of Rafi and Pervaneh wanly climb the Staircase of Torture without some ache of pity. The play has philosophy too, and this, though pessimistic, is not utterly despairing. Since death is but a sleep and a forgetting, and "the memories of the dead are thinner than their dreams," golden, while we may yet travel, is the journey to Samarkand.

Let me leave it alike to the "bookful blockhead ignorantly read" and the student of exquisite taste to decide whether or no Hassan is a literary masterpiece to be mentioned in the same breath with those of Shakespeare. (My own view is that whoever first coupled these authors together is a prize idiot.) Let us agree that in the theatre the play is episodic and something broken-backed. Hassan, philosophe, is no Hamlet. He squats at the Divan of the Caliph with never a word to say, and is mum before the pronouncement of the lovers' doom. Shakespeare would not

have forgotten him so. But the next scene brings a quality of mingled ecstasy and agony which is neither greater nor less than Shakespeare, but is simply not to be found in that poet. Rafi, the king of the beggars who have conspired against the Caliph, and his lover, Pervaneh, are to be granted their lives on condition that he shall go into exile and that she shall become the Caliph's lawful wife. The alternative is one day of love, and death together in utmost torment. It is the man who holds life dear, who knows that love fades, and muses on his own country, his people, his white-walled house, his books and old friends, his garden of flowers and trees. The voice is the voice of Rafi, but the heart is old Montaigne. He wavers:

"What have I decided? ... You locked the silver fetters round my neck, and I forgot these manacles of iron: you perfumed me with your hair till this cell became a meadow: you turned towards me eyes in whose night the seven deep oceans flashed their drowned stars, and all your body asked without speech, 'Wilt thou die for love?'"

And again:

"Shall we choose laughter and tears, sorrow and desire, speech and silence, and the shout of the man behind the hill?"

We catch echoes of Synge and Stevenson, but perhaps we are listening to all the poets singing together who have loved life and hated easeful death. Pervaneh pleads for love and doom lest the Trumpeter of Immortality be shamed, and in the sure and certain hope that in some garden she and her lover will walk side by side. If I am to make any criticism of Mr. Basil Dean's extraordinarily faithful arrangement for the stage it is that he has not found some means of giving the ensuing colloque sentimental between these ghostly lovers who find themselves betrayed:

"Te souvient-il de notre extase ancienne?"

"Pourquoi voulez-vous donc qu'il m'en souvienne?"

"Qu'il était bleu, le ciel, et grand, l'espoir!"
"L'espoir a fui, vaincu, vers le ciel noir."

These ghosts talk their Verlaine unwittingly. "Speak to me, speak to me, Rafi." "Rafi-Rafiwho was Rafi?" Pervaneh cries: "Speak to thy love!" But all that the ghost of Rafi, now scarcely visible and very faint, may make for answer is "Cold ... cold ... cold." And the wind sweeps these spectres out of the garden solitaire et glacé. So torture and death have been in vain, and even hope has died under the dark sky. I am inclined to think that the ghosts' silent tableau is more likely to suggest reunion to those who have not read the play. The implication in the constant interval between them is too subtle to reach all minds. Will not Mr. Dean reconsider this, since great, if unintentional, violence is done to Flecker here? The restoration of the ghostly dialogue would turn this melodrama into something approaching tragedy. Another would undoubtedly have called the play "The Tragedy of Rafi and Pervaneh." And I confess to a hankering after the coffins. But perhaps Mr. Dean knows what is best for our nerves.

What, all this time, has become of Hassan? You may well ask. Flecker in this play is like a composer whose second theme has taken on such an intensity of dramatic significance that he forgets to go back to his first, and only at the last, and out of compunction, bethinks him of a coda. The emptying of the garden by the wind finishes this play.

The epilogue, although it brings us back to human aspiration and romance, and also to this Persian Mr. Polly, the confectioner with a soul for poetry, flowers, friendship, and good design in carpets, remains something tacked on. But since good playgoers will watch a play of wit "with the same spirit that its author writ," let us admit boldly that Flecker was torn by two exquisite themes, and did them justice in turn. Exploitation of all kinds of beauty, and not their reconciliation, was his game. And against Hassan's spiritual burgeonings we are to set the Caliph's passion for a world made after the heart of Théophile Gautier—a world of bronze and marble, and passions like purple velvet.

Mr. Malcolm Keen's Caliph was a shin .g and sinister performance. Few actors could have stepped so authentically out of the *Arabian Nights*. Mr. Basil Gill gave us the figure of Rafi, but hardly the underlying poet. Mr. Ainley did, perhaps, less than was possible with Hassan, and he was bound by his part to remain, let us say, in the middle distance. And I think his ghazel, beginning "How splendid in the morning glows the lily," was too full-throated.

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The lines did not hang in the air as they should. The thing is a cadenza to be caressed, and Mr. Ainley proclaimed it something after the manner of battalion orders.

As the explicit and confessed poet, Mr. Leon Quartermaine was simply exquisite. This was verse as it ought to be said, though the actual metre was that of prose. Mr. Willard's Executioner was capital. Miss Cathleen Nesbitt made a pretty show of abandonment in which I did not quite believe, and Miss Laura Cowie loved with a wild and passionate devotion of which Bunthorne would have entirely approved. She yearned and yearned and yearned. . . . But this is the essence of her part, and I grow impious.

The music of Mr. Delius has the quality of being too subtle and too modern to be easily caught by me at a first hearing. I hope that Mr. Newman will tell us what we should properly think about it. One seemed to hear the horns of "Scriabinsky" too pronouncedly blowing. And shouldn't the Bacchanal sow riot in the blood? "Schéhérazade" lifts even the unmusical out of his seat; yet I, who have been listening to music all my life, got no tingling in the ears out of the dance themes, which might have accompanied elders in synod losing their tempers. But much of the music is recognisably exquisite, and the processional march is terrific.

The setting is wholly superb. Never has the texture of stone and marble been so delightedly conveyed. Scene follows scene with a most admirable propriety

in loveliness. M. Fokine's ballets are such as we should have expected, and the Procession of Protracted Death is a fine thing. The chorus and ballet are good, and the production as a whole is one of extraordinary beauty.

The play had a magnificent reception.

September 23.

"Ancient Lights"

A COMEDY BY EDWARD PERCY

EVERYMAN THEATRE

A LL things are against the Everyman Theatre.

It is an immense distance from civilisation. The next train is invariably the one that goes to Highgate. Hampstead's lift exceeds all others in length and tedium. Nobody has ever been there on a fine evening. The foyer at the theatre is a cubby-hole, and in the meagre cloakroom no fox could go to ground. Pallid æsthetes pule in the lobby, twanging lutes strung with their own hair. The farthing's worth of light thrown back from the auditorium's whitewashed walls scarcely enables you to decipher your programme. Yet I always come away from Hampstead feeling that I have been in contact with a playwright who has been furnished with a mind, and actors who are provided with temperament—contact with the theatre, in a word. The management at the Everyman has realised that half the business of the play is challenge and provocation, and Mr. Macdermott, when he goes on a journey, takes care to let his house only to tenants of like persuasion.

Ancient Lights is a provokingly poor play, yet

Messrs. Milton Rosmer and Richard Coke, who present it, might with impunity challenge the West End manager to show that he is in the habit of producing anything better. The provocation of the piece consists in that it might so easily have been a stimulatingly good one. The prologue and the first two acts play as though Mr. Percy had been fired by a performance of Milestones, during the intervals of which he had read fragments of The Master Builder; the last act suggests a bad attack of Daddalums. The piece, in so far as it harks back to Ibsen, is not without ideas; and a play with ideas, although they may be somebody else's, is half-way to the play of ideas, connoting that they are the playwright's own. The challenge to the West End manager would be, of course, to prove that his plays contain ideas belonging to anybody.

Mr. Beerbohm has made Mr. George Moore explain why when people talked of Tintoretto he always found himself thinking of Turgéneff. Let me say that whenever a playwright gives me half a chance I shall hark back to the Ibsen which is in him. Ibsen is one of the few foreigners who have survived our 'nineties. Receding, he looms ever bigger. That is perhaps why, when on Monday last the actors spoke lines which they believed to be Mr. Percy's, I found myself thinking of Ibsen who informed them. It is pure Ibsen which makes the father say: "My age is invested in my son," and the father's father retort: "And my youth is invested in your boy." It is pure Ibsen which makes the lad answer, in effect though

not in words, that he is not an insurance policy taken out for the benefit of his forbears, payable when they shall have reached the ages of sixty and ninety respectively. "You're asking for my life," says the son. "I gave it you in the first instance," insists the father. This is the attitude towards the family which prevailed until the early 'eighties.

On reflection, I am not sure that the book in Mr. Percy's pocket may not have been Samuel Butler's The Way of all Flesh, finished in 1884. "Le père de famille est capable de tout "is the maxim which underlies both that great novel and this little play. You remember how George Pontifex threatened to cut off Theobald without even a sixpence unless he repented of the folly and wickedness of not wanting to be a clergyman. "Folly and wickedness" represents old Ambrose Blest's view of his son Robert's refusal to become a great artist, and, in turn, Robert's attitude towards his son Raoul's obstinacy in determining his career for himself. Theobald and Christina Pontifex held that their children ought to be geniuses, because they were the children of Theobald and Christina, and it was "naughty of them not to be geniuses."

The Blest family holds in succession that it is naughty of Robert not to want to be an artistic genius, and of Raoul not to want to be a commercial genius. Raoul wants to be a doctor, and of him Butler could equally well have stated that "his father and grandfather could probably no more understand his state of mind than they could understand Chinese."

Butler was even more hostile to the conception of the family than was Ibsen. He points out that fishes get along quite nicely without family life, and that ants and bees sting their fathers to death as a matter of course, and mutilate nine-tenths of the offspring committed to their charge. Mr. Percy in this play shows us sons behaving in entirely ant and beelike fashion. His last act is a piece of bad logic and good bathos, and I propose to consider it as not having been written.

Of course, I am not going to pretend that Mr. Percy is an Ibsen or a Butler. The point is that a play which reverberates even with these borrowed rumblings is more "worth while" than a fashionable comedy whose tinkle, though authentic, is without meaning.

It would be easy to pull Ancient Lights to pieces. There is that foolish last act. There is the derivative butler, whom my colleagues have been calling Shavian when they really mean Wildean. Surely "I always found marriage an unsatisfactory way of settling a difference" is an inferior variant of "I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person." The wit of this factotum lacks the quality of his predecessor's, and sometimes fails him altogether. "Benton, you're a pessimist," says somebody, and the fellow is stumped for an answer. "Lane, you're a perfect pessimist," said Algernon upon hearing that to-morrow is never fine, and Lane has the superb,

"I do my best to give satisfaction, sir." There is the more important matter of the momentum of the characters. Mr. Percy's characters have not that almost uncanny knack of coming to life and taking on first-class importance almost before they have opened their mouths.

The piece is well played. Mr. Nicholas Hannen's Robert could not have been bettered. Mr. Milton Rosmer, who played old Ambrose, is becoming a very good simulator of old age, which he presents without unnecessary mumblings, wheezings, and creakings. Actors as a rule fight shy of the sixties and harry a man from his prime to the grave at a speed which is almost indecent. Mr. Rosmer portrayed a man at the time of life when he is ready for a bishopric, as nimble still of gaiter as of brain. As the Ibsenitish juvenile lead, Mr. Walter Hudd was over-burdened. Nobody believed in his "mission"; he was just a nice boy who ought to have been keen on lawn tennis. It could be wished that Miss Irene Rooke could be cast, just for once, out of the diocese of the sugar-basin. When this artist had not to be cloying she was very good indeed. Miss Louise Holbrook's Mrs. Skewton was amusing. The play was received with some enthusiasm, and, shorn of its last act, would be worthy of considerable respect.

October 7.

"The Second Round"

A PLAY BY HALCOTT GLOVER

EVERYMAN THEATRE

A S I sit down to tackle Mr. Glover's play which, at Hampstead, has failed so accountably, the post brings me the same writer's Drama and Mankind (Ernest Benn Ltd. 8s. 6d.). Dipping into it I find a passage very apposite to something that I want to say about this play. Mr. Glover is suggesting that critics should recognise a few simple categories of merit, and indicate the one to which the particular play under notice belongs. Thus we might say: Class I., Æschlyus, Shakespeare, Racine. Class II., Molière, Congreve, Sheridan, Ibsen, Shaw, Galsworthy, Monkhouse. Class III., Phillips, Flecker, Drinkwater, Bottomley (Gordon). Class IV., Barrie, Davies, Chapin, Hankin, Wilde. Class V., Pinero, Iones, Sutro. Class VI., the authors of Tons of Money. Mr. Glover suggests classification by qualities; I have jotted down a few names to show how the thing might pan out.

In the absence of such accepted categories, what happens? The critic has before him some bright,

unpretentious drawing-room comedy. In its way, and as far as it goes, it is good. At least, it is not dishonest, and the critic writes a kindly account. The next play which he visits is an unsuccessful attempt to clothe in flesh and blood some vision, ecstasy, or what-not. The critic, as Mr. Glover says, sits up. Here is something to get hold of. And, at once, with great relish and gusto, he hacks into the poor thing to see what its vitals are. His criticism, read casually, would pass for one of condemnation. The instructed reader knows better; the careless or undiscerning may fail to see that blame on a high level may indicate greater achievement than that connoted by low-grade praise.

Mr. Glover's latest play belongs to the highest class of drama but one. (The highest, of course, is the poetic.) It is chock-full of brilliant thinking. Having said this, let me declare that it is not nearly so good an evening's entertainment, qua entertainment, as Charley's Aunt. That masterpiece was, on its own level, about 98 per cent. perfection, Box and Cox being the standard of excellence in this line. The Second Round took too long to get going, and was unconscionably protracted. It was a debate with only one speaker, who was admittedly mad and drunk. It upheld a thesis which must have been extremely distasteful to many people, and which no acquaintance of mine, except a sea-captain in one of Mr. Conrad's books, has had the logic and courage to put into practice. The play was unfair to those characters

who did not "hold with" the thesis. It was uniformly gloomy. Yet, with all its faults, one must maintain the thing to be in the Ibsen class. I do not mean that it was as good as Ibsen. I mean that it dealt with a theme which Ibsen might have handled, and brought to it a comparable seriousness. The question here is of category, not of order in class. Mr. Glover may not be higher than twentieth in form; this is not to say that he does not belong to the lower sixth.

Pessimism, logically prosecuted, may end in a lot of things. It may seem to end in the Preacher's "Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun," afterwards moving to a full and final chord in that whole duty of man which was declared the conclusion of the matter. Pessimism may end in debauchery, in stoicism, in complacency and a book of verses under a tree, in Russian novels, in such poetical nonsense as "Since we must die, how bright the starry track!" in the romantic melancholy of

Et des amours desquelles nour parlons, Quand serons morts, n'en sera plus nouvelle. Pour ce aymez-moy ce pendant qu'estes belle.

Pessimism may even end in the conviction of a Paul Hatteras that humanity is better dead. Holding this belief Paul would kill wife and daughter, and is only prevented by his own timely death. The hypothesis seems to me insane, but then I am no pessimist. I refuse to believe in a purposeless world, happening "of itself," and coming to pieces like a jug

in a housemaid's hand. Yet the critic must surely prick his ears at some such passage as:

"I believe in the fire of the sun and the stars, in the interstellar cold; in the depths of the earth and the heights of mountains; in those worlds where the peace of eternity is not broken, in those ages when life was not, and shall not be. Amen."

When I hear this recited on the stage, I know that I am in the presence of a man who can write and argue. I sit up. Here is something to get hold of. What should B say now? (That the audience should ask this is the title-deed to a good play.) Were I in B's place I should call in aid Loti's steeple:

"Bless in me the shield which guards you from the abyss. Seek, in your infinite littleness, to emulate the dead sleeping at my feet, who departed in simple faith, unmindful of the void, and without trouble of the stars."

But then, as I say, I know not pessimism, which is a malady incident to Teutons and other nasty folk.

I think I could have sat through another two hours of this play. We were just coming to intellectual grips—though as a mere entertainment the thing for some time had been a weariness—when eleven o'clock struck. I will admit that the imbroglio isn't comic, that there are no pretty bonnets in the piece, and that the pursuit of a fourth, and after that a fifth, dimension is not as uncomplicatedly joyous as the chase after Charley's Aunt. That lady is still running after twenty, thirty—or is it fifty?—years. I saw her recently at Bournemouth. Mr. Glover's play dropped down stone-dead after fewer than a dozen

performances. I can account for this. It was too good in substance, and there was no comic bishop, butler, or boiled owl for the entertainment of weaker vessels. It was too good even for Hampstead. Paul was quite marvellously acted by Mr. Michael Sherbrooke. Miss Louise Hampton, Miss Nan Marriott Watson, and Mr. Edward Rigby got in an occasional word edgeways. They tell me that these performances were extremely good, and I can well believe it. But I was so busy concocting questions with which to heckle Mr. Sherbrooke that I had no time for other admiration.

November 18.

"The Likes of Her"

A PLAY BY CHARLES M'EVOY

St. MARTIN'S THEATRE

THE Likes of Her is rapidly nearing its hundredth performance. My reason for writing about it this week is that space may not be available when the event happens. Gilbert Jessop calls that man a good batsman who goes for first-class bowling like a shark after a nigger's leg; and perhaps it is the mark of the self-respecting critic that he likes to go for a good play, to get his teeth into it, shake it, and find out what there is inside. After all, there is no fun in coming to grips with effete farces and namby-pamby comedies, which buckle or come undone at the first onslaught, and leave the critic victor over tin and sawdust. This it is which makes me want to have my whack at this admirable comedy, produced when I was on holiday.

Mr. Charles M'Evoy is a foeman worthy of any steel. His David Ballard was an epoch-making play in the strict sense of that much abused word. It really did inaugurate an epoch. It was the piece upon which Miss Horniman rang up the curtain of the Manchester Repertory Theatre. Well do I remember

that first performance! Realism appeared once more to have descended upon our stage; not the silly actuality of the milk-jug, but blessed realism with a vision behind it. I remember as though it were yesterday the David Ballard of Iden Payne, now absorbed by America; the Percy Ballard of Charles Bibby, nobly lost and mourned; their fretful, large-hearted, fussy, common, and altogether adorable mother, played by—need I name her?—Clare Greet. I remember how, that night, the River Irwell broke into miraculous flames. "Irwell to-night, Thames to-morrow!" I remember crying aloud.

All that is twenty years ago. And once more the proverb held true that whatever Manchester may think to-day, London will please herself what she thinks to-morrow. David Ballard did not set the Thames on fire, and the quick-kindled fame of M'Evoy faded away. The reader will, perhaps, realise the peculiar interest and sympathy with which I read, in Scotland in August last, of the ecstatic reception of The Likes of Her. The whole London Press, it appeared, was a-shimmer with appreciation; in the mind's eye sparks danced on the bosom of London's river. They were dancing still when I saw this play on Monday evening.

One of Mr. Chesterton's monumental sanities occurs to me here—that one which is embodied in his preface to *David Copperfield*. Page after page of niggling disparagement are presented to the disillusioned reader, who, in the final paragraph, comes across some

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such phrase as this: "These things being said, this book remains one of the greatest productions of the human mind." This faulty book is declared, you see, to be a work of genius in its total gesture. Mr. M'Evoy's play seems to me to be in exactly contrary Its total gesture is almost ludicrously inept. One wonders what a French playwright would say to it. What would M. Paul Géraldy, who, at the same theatre this week, reduced his theme by force of persistent logic to the last tenuity of goldbeater's skin-what would M. Géraldy say to three acts of the most persistent fobbing-off? This play is exactly like a boxing-match in which the contestants make magnificent entry, are duly gloved, cautioned, disrobed, and propelled towards each other, and even go so far as to manœuvre for position. And then, without a blow struck, the master of ceremonies announces that the fight is over. Mr. M'Evoy cries "Oyez! Oyez!" throughout three acts, and we hear nothing of his problem at all.

What will Sally Winch do upon discovery that her lover has been horribly mutilated? The French have a story of a peasant girl to whom is delivered a hardly recognisable bundle of maimed humanity, sans limbs, sans eyes. "C'est mon homme!" she declares simply. And the crowd makes way, and are silent in the presence of supreme devotion. Sally Winch is not given the chance of proving herself of like metal. So far from being unsightly, the appearance of George Miles is not even unusual. I do not believe that a

foreigner, having no English, would know that there was anything to distinguish George from the other characters, or that he would have the foggiest notion of what the play is about.

The Likes of Her belongs to a well-defined category, peculiar to this country—the "All-Along" Drama. Its examples are at once moral and amusing, instructive and soothing. The playwright poses a problem to which there cannot, in reason and logic, be a happy ending. He works away at it for three hours, holds it up to the footlights, turns it this way and that, and finally, when it is obvious that the happy ending cannot by any possibility be forthcoming, discovers a hidden spring or concealed fact which shows that, all along, the problem was no problem at all. Thus we shall spend an evening debating whether a young gentleman from Eton may marry a Chinese lady, only to discover as the curtain falls that she is the kidnapped daughter of the Duchess of Newington Butts, and therefore of the bluest Cockney blood. What shall the likes of Sally Winch do on discovering that her young man is maimed beyond recognition? Why, make him not recognisably different from anybody else! The truth is that Mr. M'Evoy has got hold of a theme which, possibly, cannot be exploited on the stage.

This play is immeasurably inferior, psychologically speaking, to Mr. Kipling's *The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot*, to the tales of Arthur Morrison, to Mr. Maugham's *Liza of Lambeth*. But these things being

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said, it remains an entrancing entertainment. The superficial characterisation, the accidents of Cockney speech and manner are masterly. And then it is all extraordinarily well acted. There is little Miss Hermione Baddeley who, the previous February in a play by Georges Duhamel, showed promise of something very like genius, and now fulfils it. There is Miss Mary Clare, obviously good enough to tackle the problem which Mr. M'Evoy burkes; and there is Mr. Leslie Banks, filling out every nook and cranny, every trick of Alf Cope's thought and being. But, indeed, all the parts are flawlessly played. In a strict sense, this is a poor play. But the fact remains that as an entertainment it is excellent "beyond anything that ever I saw."

November 4.



Melodrama



"The Dancers"

A PLAY BY HUBERT PARSONS

WYNDHAM'S THEATRE

PERUSAL in the study would be a poor test for so heartsome an entertainment as The Dancers by Mr. "Hubert Parsons," produced with every circumstance and portent of a long run. On the night of my visit people all around me could not contain their delight; the purring and gurgling amounted almost to an accompaniment of slow music. There is no underhand scorn here: public judgment was soundly based. In the theatre it was all capital, great fun, "immense." Reading, one might have been tempted to a few pertinent queries. What, exactly, is the moral standing of a woman who looks calmly on while her relative-less little protégée dances herself into maternity, and then advises her to marry an Earl and say nothing about it. "Perhaps it will blow over" she has the air of suggesting. Outside the theatre such a woman could not be politely designated. But since, in the theatre, she is acted by Miss Lilian Braithwaite-who, long before she actually impersonated Sir Arthur Pinero's sentimental laundress, had established what amounts to a tradition in Ruth

Rolts of every estate and degree, "nice," sympathetic women of unimpeachable outlook and morals—we are content to believe that investigation would be strictly impertinent. We should learn nothing, since when inquiries are obviously courted it is of little avail to make them. And then Miss Braithwaite never for one moment relinquishes that moral pocket-handker-chief which she tucks in the palm of her hand like Elizabeth in the Hall of Song. Will this convention never die?

To watch Miss Braithwaite manipulate in the same hand both handkerchief and cigarette is to do more than marvel at a feat of virtuosity, it is to ponder the twofold virtues of modesty and broadmindedness. Again, in the study, we might be tempted to ask whether a young girl, who is so mercenary as to jump at an Earl whom she has not seen since childhood and now imagines bearded, would at discovery that he is clean-shaven, fall into such a passion of love that she must, for his sake, commit suicide, metaphorically on the steps of the altar, actually as she is about to step into the carriage. Miss Audrey Carten makes us accept this; it is a pity that this new recruit should spoil a moving performance by delivering so many lines to the audience and too insistently presenting her interlocutor with the nape of her neck. Or, reading, we might ask whether a Saskatchewan bar-tender who unexpectedly becomes an Earl would telegraph an order to a young woman whom he has not met for ten years to marry him within two hours of his arrival.

But we reflect, first, that a man who could successfully run a bar in Western Canada on lines which the late Mrs. Ormiston Chant would have approved, could do anything; and second, that it is as good to watch Sir Gerald du Maurier do preposterous things as to look on at more portentous and duller actors doing sensible ones. Do Canadian light-o'-loves become French dancers and refuse English Dukes offering their coronets, castles, and grouse-moors in marriage? Miss Tallulah Bankhead makes us feel that they do, and that right charmingly. Your Englishman dearly loves a Lord, but nowhere so dearly as on the stage. Even if Winfield had not been intended by Providence for a Duke his tailor must have put that little matter right. That His Grace could wear three enormous diamond studs in his shirt-front and not look like a pawnbroker was a triumph of which any actor might have been proud. The house took delightedly to Mr. A. Scott-Gatty. Like Fielding's hero, he presented to those who know no noblemen a convincing portrait of nobility.

I enjoyed the bustle and high spirits, the theatricality of it all. Perhaps I regretted at times that it was not a film, that I was deprived of the scenes in the Hall of Jazz, of the telegraph-boy's drive in the Western Canadian snows, of the railway accident which, by removing the intervening Chievelys, made Tony into a peer. On the other hand, no sleek, pomaded shadow could have equalled Sir Gerald du Maurier's lively substance, which always puts me in

mind of certain attributes of Suett—" a loose gait, a slippery tongue, this last the ready midwife to a without-pain-delivered jest; in words, light as air, venting truths deep as the centre." Certainly no other actor, save possibly Mr. Seymour Hicks, could more lightly or accurately describe a wedding as "strings of girls carrying delphiniums upside down." No other player could so convincingly leap a barcounter, or, nose to nose with a dago, emit a more succinct, "Beat it, yellow streak!" or touch more lightly the difficult, infeasible passages of pathos. Nothing would induce me to read this play, which I could see again with pleasure. Wherefore the deduction that it is a good play.

March 3.

"Beltane Night"

A PLAY BY VERA BERINGER

ALDWYCH THEATRE

T is a mistake, perhaps, to insist that a play must I be definitely labelled good or bad; the great thing is that it shall not be just middling. Beltane Night is never that; it is an amateur's play, compact of obvious faults which a professional hand would have smoothed away, and of virtues which that leveller would have smothered. Take that scene in which a young girl meets for the first time the father of her dead fiancé. Whatever the playwright's standing, there is no reasonable doubt as to what the girl must do; it is what she shall say that is the difficulty. Shall she, lifting her sobbing head, declare that she loved the boy beyond the limits of the credible, that she would have made him a good wife, that this is her punishment for over-joy, etc. etc. ?

These are the things which the professional playwright believes must always be true because professional playwrights have always deemed them so, a line of reasoning which seems to me to be as logical as

that of the ready-made tailor who advertises ten thousand "dictinctive" suits of the same pattern. But Miss Beringer still cherishes the amateurish notion that a character on the stage should say the kind of thing which would actually be said in real life. Therefore her young woman's first words are: "He made everything such fun." Inasmuch as this is exactly the impression which the young man himself has created on our minds, the sentence rings extraordinarily true, and prepares us for a long colloquy as sincere and moving as it is, in the theatre, unexpected.

Possibly not all the credit here belonged to the dramatist. Mr. Sam Livesey is one of those actors whose excellence varies directly with his part. Give him as framework a few truthful sentences, and he will create an unmistakable human being; but let a false note creep into the text and he dissolves to nothing. I cannot remember an actor with so little power of bluff as Mr. Livesey, about whose affirmations in this play there was an almost Quakerish honesty. We believed in his rather "tall" talk of affection for his son; we believed in certain little matters of telepathy and psychic vision, simply because the character professing these experiences spoke as simply of them as an honest man so afflicted would speak. When this father said: "There was no room even for God between my boy and me. He'll know that's meaning no disrespect, being a Father Himself," we assented to a cry from the heart.

When the motherless girl said something which in cold print probably looks rather silly: "Father, I think you must be just like a mother," we, in the theatre, felt not only that no apter tribute could have been paid to the actor's tenderness, but that this is exactly what the girl would have said at that moment. In a word, the actors held us for just so long as the seeming commonplaces of the dialogue were those in which people speaking under strong emotion naturally abound. But when Mr. Livesey asked Miss Carey to contemplate the stars and suggested that robust Mr. John Williams-whom he had seen ten minutes before in nicely-creased tennis trousers and a smart sports jacket—was looking at her through their eyes, why, then we knew very well that he wasn't doing anything of the sort, that the amateur had given way to the professional concocter of "literary" phrases. And at once Mr. Livesey came down with a bump. And when, later, he proposed to spend a month as a visitor in a country house with the object of entrapping his hostess into a confession of murder over afternoon tea, why, then we knew that Miss Beringer had been reading the Sunday newspapers and had imbibed their spirit but not their verisimilitude.

As soon as I hear the word "psycho-analysis" on the stage I give myself and the play up for lost. It seems to me as unlikely that a playwright will be an expert in a peculiarly recondite branch of medical science as that a consulting physician will be an expert

in writing plays. I can believe in Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and, at a pinch, Crippen, simply because I have to. But I have not got to believe in a Lady Macbeth complex, and I won't. I will not believe that a sane and normal woman, brought up by a grandmother, name of Gruach, to believe that she is descended from Lady Macbeth, will murder a young man who happens to stand between her and some new cretonnes for the drawing-room. (Nor, incidentally, that a famous Harley Street specialist will experiment with a galvanometer on his hostess after dinner, and talk at random until the chance word "murder" rings the bell and returns the operator his penny.) It seems to me that a woman who murders a man to ensure that her husband, who remains in ignorance throughout, can keep up the supply of saddle-horses and motor-cars, provides the playwright with a bagful of conscious motive. In the alternative I suggest that a hostess who, when her guest proposes to run up to town next day, stares into vacancy and mutters: "Oh, never shall sun that morrow see," and goes about the house babbling of the innocent flower and being the serpent under it, is a subject not for a play but for a clinic. There is an old story which relates how a spectator at a performance of The Wild Duck, turned to the author and said, "These people are all mad." Ibsen, the story goes, nodded assent. Well, again, I don't believe it. There is little drama in declared insanity, and none at all in a clash of conflicting subconsciousnesses. For if once you begin

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you cannot stop. Lady Macbeth herself must hark back to some remoter Gruach, thence to some Palæolithic ancestress, then the pterodactyl, the amæba, the moneron, energy, and ultimately the First Cause. And I submit that where there is no freewill there is no drama.

My advice to any playwright who can hold us with dialogue of such quality as Miss Beringer showed for ten minutes is to leave the subconscious alone. The present heroine's complex merely served to demonstrate what a good play Shakespeare managed to write in spite of his ignorance of psycho-analysis, and what a wretched thing *Macbeth* would have been without the Thane of Cawdor.

Miss Esmé Beringer played this pseudo Lady Macbeth as we may suppose Mrs. Siddons to have played the real one—that is, very like the serpent, and not at all like the flower. The older actress had this advantage, that when she had seen Duncan to the foot of the stairs and asked him if he had everything he required for the night, her "comedy" was over; whereas Miss Beringer had to pour out tea and play the hostess for a whole act, and of anything less than the horrific she has, alas! no inkling. Her sleepwalking was the best I have ever seen. This actress would make a mouthful of those masculine viragoes who rant of their lost thrones throughout Shakespeare's Histories, and if ever a West End Richard should be looking for a Queen Margaret, I can honestly recommend Miss Beringer as the very man. She has the

handsome technique of your regular royal Tragedy Queen, and prefers, like John Philip Kemble, not to raise tragedy from earth, but to lower it from the skies.

March 31.

"Ned Kean of Old Drury"

A PLAY BY ARTHUR SHIRLEY

DRURY LANE

TES; but why Ned? On the principle, I suppose, of those correspondence colleges which engage to turn a ploughboy into a poet, "earn while you learn" and all the rest of it. "Carlyle," said one of these dreadful tutors recently, "could not sell to-day an article entitled 'Dress.' Even the sage of Ecclefechan must have fallen into line, and demanded of his readers 'Should Women wear Clothes?" It would appear that Mr. Arthur Shirley, the playwright, and Mr. Arthur Collins, the producer, have held that Edmund Kean was an unmarketable title; and possibly their diagnosis of one of the maladies of our vulgar age was correct. On the first night many hearts must have beat for Ned, whose owners knew not Edmund.

And, of course, Ned is put through all his paces. The play begins with a good old English scene—a coaching moorland in the mood of Mr. Hardy's The Trumpet Major. This is very well painted, but unfortunately the programme does not give the

name of the artist, who, I suggest, is as worthy of mention as the perruquier. This scene was spoilt by the intrusion of a real coach and real horses, proving once more that, on the stage, there is no greater bar to reality than real things. If Mr. Saintsbury was to half-persuade me that he was Edmund Kean, these four sorry beasts, wheelers and leaders, did not give me the least impression that they were horses. The hunter on wires at the Marionette Theatre was ever so much more "real." (This, I admit, is one up to the Puppets. If only people would claim for these little creatures that they are, oh, so different from—and, if they like, better than—human beings, instead of insisting upon nonsensical identity!)

After the coach comes poor Ned, on foot, with wife and family. They are to perform a play in the Squire's barn, and Ned must first give the villagers a taste of his quality. The snack is almost a full meal. As hors d'œuvre there is a passage from Romeo and Juliet; the entrée is from Henry V., cut short after a single mouthful—" Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more "-by the remark of a soldier in the crowd, "Stow it, guv'nor; let's 'ave summat about peace!" or Georgian equivalent; the pièce de résistance is, of course, John of Gaunt's "This royal throne of kings," etc. For an encore Kean reels off a "descriptive piece" concerning the life of an actor on the lines of Sir Dan Godfrey's musical medleys. The villagers' appetites are dully whetted; a Dr. Drury has his emotions stirred, and his stolen

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purse restored, by Ned; the Earl of Essex is engaged to keep an eye on the strolling player.

The second act is given up to the death of little Howard, extraordinarily well played by Miss Gabrielle Casartelli. The child is his father's inspiration and "sternest critic," and shows a nice appreciation of the passages best suited to show off an actor. "Read to me, Daddy!" finds our Ned, who has just looked in at the sick-room between the last act of Othello and the harlequinade, not only complaisant but in good voice. "What shall I read, my child?" Tactfully Howard suggests that little bit about the world being a stage. "I know," says Ned, "and all the men and women merely players," and so slips into the body of the recitation. This is followed by a dreadful passage in which Howard promises his father that he shall one day play Shylock. "I shall not see it, Daddy; I shall be beneath the Devonshire daisies." This is of a mawkishness to which not even Harriet Beecher Stowe aspired. "But take the handkerchief," goes on Master Eva, "tuck it that night in your gaberdine, and under the Devonshire daisies I shall be happy." "C'est gigantesque!" as Flaubert used to say. The third act shows Ned drunk, not half-seas over, nor politely coxybobus, but drunk, drunk as "Brugglesmith." In this condition he muses upon Death and the Hereafter. His lips move, you hear no sound, yet know that he is debating whether 'tis nobler in the mind. . . . And with the words "slings and arrows" the drunken player emerges upon an audible and

familiar sea of recitation. A quarrel with a military bully follows, and Ned, after wishing the slave had forty thousand lives, one being too poor, too weak for his revenge, takes by the throat the uncircumcised dog, etc. etc. Recalled by little Howard's handkerchief, with which he mops his brow, to some sense of his responsibility as an actor, Ned rushes on to the stage to give a performance so tremendously delirious that the Earl of Essex, who is again on hand, gives him his chance at Drury Lane. The fourth act shows us the lodgings in the Strand from which Kean set out on that great occasion, the stage-door of Drury Lane Theatre, the manager's waspish introduction of the new Shylock, the back of the stage with the noise of the pit rising as Hazlitt declares it to have done. Kean himself looking exactly like the picture by Watt given in Doran, the reception after the performance at the little house in Cecil Street. This last scene was remarkable for two impersonations-Miss Haidée Wright's Mrs. Garrick and Mr. Edward Cooper's Lord Byron. As soon as the former began to speak, a hush fell on the house as though it feared to lose a syllable. There was no danger, so clear, penetrative, and thrilling were the tones of this great little actress. As all theatregoers know, Miss Wright is a diminutive person; yet she holds the stage, the theatre, and all the people in it, in the hollow of her hand. She has the faculty, which we always associate with genius, of raising humanity to a higher power of significance, of endowing normal emotion with a

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poignancy not ordinarily perceived. Our theatrical impresarios would do better to concern themselves less with puppets and more with Miss Wright. They should build a theatre, possibly not quite life-size, and let us see this fine player as—well, as Lady Macbeth. I cannot imagine any part which this little lady would not finely conceive, and her technique lags not an inch behind her conceptions. Byron filled the eye amazingly, and from Mr. Cooper's presentment one realised how so meretricious a poet contrived to impose himself upon his age. Surely no comet ever posed athwart the heavens with such flaming success as this clever rhymster across the Georgian sky.

Mr. H. A. Saintsbury's Ned was a good piece of embroidery on an actor's theme. He was lissome, and svelte, and slightly over-mannered, as we may suppose Kean to have been at this period. The young man was not only a tragedian but also a tight-rope dancer and clown. His impersonation of Chimpanzee, in the pantomime of La Pérouse, showed surpassing agility and "touches of deep tragedy in the monkey's deathscene, which made the audience shed tears." Mr. Saintsbury's tragedy, frankly, did not come off, but he was graceful and romantic throughout. He posed as though he were sitting for his portrait, and his attitude over the dead body of little Howard might have served as model for Romeo clambering in at Juliet's lattice, Antony importuning Death awhile, or any finely-flung gesture arrested in the moment of expression. I do not happen to conceive Kean as

being like that, but I do know that Mr. Saintsbury's portrait was the conception which all actors have of their own personal attractiveness. Probably I am putting in the malice here; Mr. Saintsbury, I am sure, was as sincere and whole-hearted as Wilson Barrett. Whatever Drury Lane audiences will stand, they will not stomach irony. And on the first night they went for Old Ned like a whale. In this theatre the play acts well enough, and there were tears for little Howard. It is not altogether rubbish.

May 19.

"The Lyons Mail"

A DRAMA BY CHARLES READE

LYCEUM THEATRE

I SUPPOSE I must have been about fourteen when I first saw this piece which, produced in 1877, at once became a regular item in Henry Irving's repertoire. It is not an idle fancy that when the curtain went up at the Lyceum the other night I recognised the café at which Lesurques is to take breakfast and Dubosc to meet his accomplices, or later that I knew every tree in the Hobbema-like countryside, and every stick and stone of that inn-yard at Lieursaint. Even the very cobbles seemed to me to prate of the great actor's memory. More prosaically, arrangements had been made to use the original scenery, costumes, and effects. Only the horses in the mail-coach were new.

How good it used to be to mark Irving's bustling entry, to note his foreign table manners, the sans-gêne with which he would cut up the bread, the easy way with which he would wipe his glass! Mr. Bransby Williams does neither of these things, and the little round cobs are a poor substitute for the long loaf which indicated so definitely that we must consider

ourselves in France. There is no pretence in the present revival that Lesurques is not some stout Britisher. Frankly, I could not believe that this upright merchant had a house in, of all places, the Rue Montmartre, or that Mr. Charles Leighton's Choppard kept a livery stable in the Rue St. Honoré. But then, I was never a believer in Charles Reade's topography. Yet it is possible that Irving, who, in another play, was sufficiently solicitous about unimportant detail to send to Nuremberg for an exact copy of its gates, may have paid Charles's expenses to Paris, with a view to establishing the earlier history of these streets. This trifling matter apart, there still remained a pronounced Cockney residuum. Fouinard would insist on leaving the "owl" affair in the hands of Dubosc. I wonder why English actors must make such a stumbling-block of the simple word "Monsieur?" If correct intonation is too much to ask, let them, at least, shift the accent back to the first syllable. Phonetically, a Frenchman says Muss'yer, and not Mussoor'.

I suppose it is the fashion to make fun of this old play, to say that its carpentry is out of date, and that it creaks with age. Well, let them say it; I, for one, enjoyed it thoroughly. It is quaint to note Lesurques's challenge: "I am the happiest man in the world." How the Greeks would have ransacked their mythology for plot and characters to fit so rash a boast! How instinct with foreboding, perceived only of us, did the old man make it! Lesurques's

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devices for getting the witnesses examined in his own drawing-room are absurdly transparent; but what a flood of romantic vehemence did Irving then unloose upon that carpet! I remember the fierce struggle which seemed to precede the laying down of the pistol at the words, "No! I have not the right to take my own life." With Irving it really did seem that God's canon against self-slaughter had intervened.

In the scene in the garret Irving used to lie with his head out of window and telegraph the happenings at the place of execution with his legs, now drumming the floor, now quite balefully and expectantly motionless. It used to be a frightening performance, and Mr. Williams roared an echo of it somewhat after Bottom's fashion, aggravating his voice as 'twere any nightingale. And perhaps he was not sufficiently pathetic. In the scenes with Lesurques père, Irving used to draw tears from the cloakroom attendant, two passages and three flights of stairs away.

Courriol is an unresolved part which George Alexander never quite explained. Like Sixteen-String Jack, who appeared in the dock with his irons tied up with blue bows, Courriol must go to the guillotine with an air, and Mr. Frederick Keen did this well enough. Mr. Leighton's Choppard was a sound performance, and Joliquet was well played by Miss Nellie Hook. Of the other ladies nothing shall be said. Their rôle is to simulate bundles of nerves to be passed on from one sheltering bosom to another.

"The Eye of Siva"

A Mystery Play by SAX ROHMER

New THEATRE

T is no use pretending that I did not enjoy The Eye of Siva, because I did. I enjoyed every moment of it. "Three glad hours, and it seemed not an hour of supreme and supernal" fooling. It would probably be very difficult to assign an exact place in dramatic literature to this play. The sources of Drama, Mr. William Archer has recently pointed out, are imitation and passion, whereas Mr. Rohmer's characters imitate nobody who ever lived, and their passions are not those by which humanity is normally or abnormally shaken. Also they are most ingeniously wrong-headed.

It is to be imagined, for example, that if you were an American Orientalist who had accidentally penetrated the heart of Thibet and stumbled upon the discovery that Tchen-Hung-Fu, or whatever his name is, was about to descend upon the white races with a plague five times more fearful than the Great War—it is to be imagined that you would not expose him in a leisurely volume, and hire a manor-house in Norfolk what time you dotted your "i's" and crossed your

"t's." You would, presumably, put some supine Government department immediately wise to the fact that if it did not wake up at once there would be no electorate left for it to draw salaries from. Also you would not, with a detective lying dead, a faithful watch-dog stabbed to the heart, grounds full of mantraps, alarums, and electric buzzers, and knowing the mandarin T.-H.-F. to be concealed in your house—you would not, I conceive, choose that evening as a propitious occasion for a dinner-party. But in this kind of play suspects must obviously be gathered together, and if the guests arrive with the air of a police crowd among whom a criminal is to be placed for identification we can hardly blame them.

Again, if you were a Secret Service Agent sent down by the Foreign Office to watch over the precious Orientalist, I suppose the first thing you would do would be to make a thorough search of the house. I imagine that what you would not do would be to hand a Cheerful Idiot a revolver, instruct him to fire at anything unusual, hide behind a picture of which you had previously cut out the eyes, and, when you startled your friend with the gleam of your secret and serviceable orbs, trust to him to miss. Probably, also, you would not place blind and entire confidence in Chinese cooks and Indian butlers. Of course, I know now why all these improbabilities were so carefully observed, but for close upon three hours they bothered me a little.

"There are moments when one does not think of

girls, are there not, dear reader?" Max once made Mr. George Moore ask. There are times when one does not think of probabilities, are there not, dear playgoer? Such a moment occurred for me when the curtain went up on a "library" barren of books, but containing a sarcophagus, a mummy-case, a faked portrait, a burglar alarm, and a malignant Chinese idol. One of the most amusing games in a theatre is spotting the criminal. The task in this case is to unmask T.-H.-F. It obviously could not be the Orientalist, and the Secret Service Agent was unlikely. The Cheerful Idiot was out of the question, and retired Indian Army officers are not the stuff of traitors, though there was a nasty glint in this particular Captain's eye. The Chinese cook was hors concours after the second act, and the Indian servant out of the running early on in the third. The local policeofficer was no good—as well might Watson have doubted Inspector Gregson of Scotland Yard-and the gardener was a mere animated cabbage. Was it not Ponson de Terrail's sister who made cardboard figures of her brother's characters, maintained them on his writing-table for so long as the story kept them alive, and laid them to rest in her work-basket as soon as they were "done in"? Mentally one laid each character by as each emerged unscathed from the furnace of suspicion, till there were left only two young ladies, the housekeeper, and "Kali, a Manchurian leopardess." The girls had not an ounce of villainy between them, and the leopardess was obviously

a red herring. Remained only the housekeeper, and since Sherlock Holmes has laid it down that if you are sure of your eliminations, that which is left, however improbable, must be what you are looking for, I fixed upon the silver-haired duenna who looked like Julia Mills forty years later. I often wonder whether the present-day reader has forgotten Miss Mills and the Diary which she used to read to David on Putney Heath. ("Are tears the dewdrops of the heart?"—I. M.) But to return to our crime.

Of course, it must be the housekeeper—I have never liked the breed. There was something sinister in the way in which Miss Kate Phillips clutched her glass of whisky-toddy and toddled off to bed. With this posset she would screw her courage to the stickingplace, and then-good-bye, Orientalist! Well, I was wrong, and I humbly apologise to Miss Phillips. I shall not reveal the playwright's secret; as far as I was concerned, it was kept until the very last moment. If you object that the dénouement doesn't really untie anything, and lands you in further difficulties-what, for instance, had the mandarin T.-H.-F. come to do in Norfolk, since it was not to destroy the book?-I can only reply that Thibetan mandarins, if such exist, are not to be accounted ordinary folk, and that it's not for the likes of you and me to judge them. There is plenty of the right kind of false alarm in the play. In the dark a mysterious individual creeps out of the dining-room with a gleaming object which might be some dread thing from the field of Golgotha.

The lights go up and you find that it is only the Chinese cook clearing away the roast in a cover worthy of Simpson's. Yes, it's a good play. So good that I am now in treaty for Mr. Rohmer's complete works on the hire-purchase system.

The acting was excellent. Mr. Reginald Bach as the Orientalist was particularly ingenious, and Mr. Arthur Wontner as the Secret Service Man turned the snags and shoals of bathos to account as cleverly as Mr. Sullivan last week utilised his cross-currents. As for Mr. Breon's Cheerful Idiot, praise, as he would say, cannot cope with him. Mr. Forrester Harvey glided through the play like a Chinese serpent of the most perfect noxiousness, and as the Indian butler Mr. Malcolm Morley appeared to pray intensely to all the Hindu gods. Or were they Mohammedan? "San fairy Ann," as we used to say. Miss Kate Phillips is a dear, and I promise never again to suspect her of murder. But what on earth is clever Miss Cathleen Nesbitt doing, walking on in company with a leopardess?

August 12.

"The Green Goddess"

A PLAY BY WILLIAM ARCHER

St. James's Theatre

R. ARCHER'S bow at the fall of the curtain "spoke volumes," as they say. "If you know of a better play," it seemed to hint, "go to it!" The enthusiasm of the audience, if I read its note correctly, signified that Mr. Archer was talking, or bowing, nonsense. The Green Goddess, in its opinion, was "the goods." None could have been better.

The author has gone right back to Scribe and the technique of 1850, which was a very good "period." You remember how, because Adrienne is to sniff at a poisoned bouquet in the fifth act, Scribe describes death by inspiration in the first. "It is a pity," says the aviator whose aeroplane has crashed in the domain of the Raja of Bong, or whatever the place is called "back" of the Himalayas, "it is a pity that I could not manage to land on that bit of level ground behind the castle. I could have made a safe landing there." Now, since Mr. Archer knows better than anybody that a play should be taut and spare as a barrel, we realise that the aviator is not merely making conversation. He is preparing us in Act I. for some rescuer's

safe landing in Act IV. The other occupants of the 'plane are a married couple who, stepping from the wreckage, expose their sentimental situation with a clarity, and at a length, reminiscent of Mr. Wells in his more tedious novels. The inhabitants of Bong are a savage lot; three of their kind, way back in Ramon Allones, are about to be put to death for the murder of a British policeman. They are the Raja's brothers, and we feel it in our bones that the Raja's enforced guests, dine they never so merrily off caviare and Perrier Jouet 1906, are in reality his hostages.

The rest of the play is made up of the ingredients which Mr. Archer has suffered, if not gladly, at least tolerantly, for so many years. Have the public always liked noble savages who, when they are scratched, reveal more of the savage than the noble? Yes. Then they shall have a Raja with a Cambridge degree, one eye on Anatole France and Marcel Proust, and the other fixed upon something with boiling oil in it. Did the public like Mr. Shaw's Cockney chauffeur? The Raja shall have a Cockney valet. Did they laugh when Mr. Shaw delivered himself of sly hits at his colleague, Mr. Walkley? They did, and the laugh this time shall be on the other side of the jester's face. "Bernard Shaw is quite a back number, but I confess his impudence entertains me!" Didn't Sardou get quite a lot of excitement out of a scene in which a woman is invited to ransom, at the price of honour, a lover who is being tortured off-stage? He did, and . . . But stay! Here Mr. Archer must have bethought

him of all he has written about terror and pity, and how the emotion roused by Tosca's agony is no different in quality from the horror evoked by a street accident. So he will have his lover about to be tortured, and no more. Again I imagine that Mr. Archer's conscience must have given him an unpleasant twinge when he wanted to leave his victims alone with the wireless. and could think of no device to get his Raja out of the way other than the barefaced one of packing him off for a pow-wow with the local Archbishop. "Excuse me, Cayley, if I finish a couple of letters," says Aubrey Tanqueray, and his absence, which lasts for five minutes, has doubtless drawn from Mr. Archer the weighty rebuke it deserves. "You will excuse me for half an hour," says the Raja, and is absent for an unconscionable time.

However, we must not be hypercritical. The new playwright probably shrugged his shoulders and decided that if the critics didn't like it they must lump it. Thus Sir Arthur before him. What is sauce for the

goose . . .

The play was well acted. Mr. George Arliss exposed his whole hand in the first ten minutes. His cards were individually good—suavity, incisiveness, unforced humour—but one got a little tired of seeing the same hand dealt and played over and over again. And I thought that he lacked just that touch of queerness and terror which Mr. Leslie Faber would have given the part. Mr. Arliss's Himalayan de Sade was a shade too much of the drawing-room. Mr. Owen Rough-

wood was good as the husband-he has studied his Majors. A trifle more charm might, I think, have been dispensed by Mr. George Relph in his prescription for Doctor Traherne. Miss Isobel Elsom threw all the emotional fits with which her part is sprinkled cleverly and emotionally enough, but they were isolated and stood up from the general texture of her performance like peaks in a mountain chain. You felt that in between she would have been quite comfortable making tea. There was one quite extraordinarily good performance—the valet of Mr. Arthur Hatherton. This was both sinister and droll. The audience shouted loudly and long for this actor after the third But he made no reappearance, for which the fact that he was supposed to be lying dead on the rocks a hundred feet below was no excuse. The Raja would have pleased the house better if he had commanded the valet to take his call. The act was undoubtedly the man's rather than the master's.

And now I have a suggestion to make. Will not Mr. Archer spend part of the two or three years which lie ahead of his play in preparing a stage-version of Stevenson and Lloyd Osbourne's *The Ebb Tide?* Mr. Arliss would play Attwater to perfection, and Mr. Hatherton would be altogether tremendous as Huish. A love-interest could doubtless be written in for Miss Elsom. Alternatively I know of a scenariomonger who . . . But why should the cinema have all the best stories?

"What Money can Buy"

A Melodrama by ARTHUR SHIRLEY AND BEN LANDECK

LYCEUM THEATRE

PRONOUNCEMENT of Dr. Johnson came to mind the other evening as I sat at this preposterous play. Writing of the non-Shakespearean stage, he declares that it is "peopled by such characters as were never seen, conversing in a language which was never heard upon topics which will never arise in the commerce of mankind." This is sweeping, but not too much so for this latest of Lyceum melodramas. What Money can Buy is not a colourable imitation of life: it is not even a presentation of which one can object that it is too highly coloured. It has nothing to do with life.

Worse still, this play has nothing to do with that phenomenon as it has presented itself to the hectic imagination of competent writers in this school. It is just silly. Now I take it that the good ship Melodrama may sail what outrageous waters she please provided she steer clear of the snag of silliness. Silliness rips her keel, and, encountering it, she must founder. Be it noted that Melodrama is, in all

soberness and not in mockery, to be accounted a good ship. Only she must be stageworthy. The learned Doctor goes on: "Upon every other stage the universal agent is love. . . . To bring a lover, a lady, and a rival into the fable; to entangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with oppositions of interest, and harass them with violence of desires inconsistent with each other; to make them meet in rapture and part in agony; to fill their mouths with hyperbolical joy and outrageous sorrow; to distress them as nothing human ever was distressed; to deliver them as nothing human ever was delivered, is the business of a modern dramatist. For this probability is violated, life is misrepresented, and language is depraved."

Yet a play may be all this and still make up a capital entertainment. There is nothing in the plot of What Money can Buy which would be intractable if handled by a master of his own craft and the melodramatic ship. A parson, ethereal to outward seeming, but a scratch player at golf and "useful" with the gloves, makes a capital lover. A young woman, formerly Number 45 at a convict prison and now on ticket-of-leave, is all that the gods ask for heroine. What better rival than a millionaire of bad repute? Consider whether there is not matter here for the Ercles' vein of a Boucicault, a Sims, a youthful Henry Arthur Jones.

Surely all those urgent, resistless sermons in the guise of novels are in this tale of a young clergyman 258

whose eloquence is such that it prompts a young woman—her shoulders we have already seen to heave—to rise in her pew and declare that after that evening's service she will sin no more. Sin, in this connection, has not its full Manxian implications, and is indeed no more than cly-faking and crib-cracking. And it may be that any "sinful" soul making so precipitant and public a declaration would be bundled out of church by a justly indignant verger. But this is a small objection. When the curtain descends we are comfortably aware that the penitent's feet are set upon the thorny path which leads ultimately to her pastor's bosom.

We know, too, that the way will prove slippery as well as thorny, that this brand plucked from the burning must endure more than one cold douche of discouragement, that she will be driven by a conscienceless police from the insecure post of housemaid in the millionaire's "establishment" to the insubstantial pillar of cashier at a hotel. For a guileless young woman, who has gone to keep a perfectly legitimate assignation with her lawfully wedded husband in a wood at midnight, to be stunned and wake up huddled upon a dead man with a discharged pistol in her pocket — this is probably what Dr. Johnson meant by distress such as nothing human ever was distressed. For a devout young clergyman to open his midnight lattice to the young woman to whom he ministered in gaol, and to be convinced by her story of an evil-minded police that her only

defence against the charge of murder is the declaration that she has passed the night in his apartment, and risk what his Bishop will say—this is doubtless what was meant by deliverance such as nothing human ever was delivered.

As for "contradictory obligations" and "inconsistent desires "-are not these to be found in a heroine torn between recurring temptation and the innate goodness which we see impelling her to church, in a hero who so far forgets his cloth as to desire to make a felon's wife his own. Can there be greater rapture of agony than that with which this girl declares, in apricot georgette, that to save her parson's soul she will sell her honour to the millionaire? Can outrageous joy and sorrow find expression more hyperbolical than coral velvet flashed with diamonds, and rags the colour of the wall-paper in that garret where, tied to a chair, the poor victim awaits the dynamiter's bomb? A touch on yonder lever, and she whose fortunes we ought to have been following with breathless interest becomes, in different sense from Isabella, "a thing ensky'd and sainted." No. there is nothing wrong with the material at the Lyceum. It has done duty well enough before, and will do good duty again. The silliness of which I complained at the beginning is purely a matter of acting and production.

I think I have never seen in any play such a conglomeration of dowdy, meaningless, vulgar scenery. There is only one good effect, which occurs at the

"What Money can Buy"

end, when finally justice is done and the roof falls in. I have never seen a crowd of minor personages quite so dingy and inefficient. The young men look as though they have bargained for their clothes in Petticoat Lane; the young women stand yawning before scenes of incredible romance, listless as waitresses taking an order for a cup of tea.

But there is some tolerable acting among the major characters. Mr. Jefferson Gore makes of the millionaire a figure the size of Michael Angelo's David. Miss Sybil Arundale is agreeable as a "lady bookie." If the production could acquire even a smattering of the "sincerity" and restraint of Mr. Dennis Neilson-Terry and Miss Jessie Belmore, the hero and heroine, I maintain that the play might even yet be made good fun.



Entertainments



"Arlequin"

A FANTASY. ADAPTED BY LOUIS N. PARKER FROM THE FRENCH OF MAURICE MAGRE

EMPIRE THEATRE

NTIL Arlequin appeared at the Empire, M. Magre was known to me by two works onlya volume of poems of a choice and pointed indecency, and a novel which Miss Pinkerton would not have found alarming. The poems had that interest which accrues when the author is interested, be his subject erotomania or tomatoes, perversity or pickles; the novel was merely revolting. French writers have no talent for the sentimental, which they label écœurant, or as we should say "sickening." When, therefore, the paragraphists heralded Arlequin as an idyll of the purest genius I was sceptical. Now that I have listened to the "free" translation at the Empire I am more than sceptical. It is possible that Mr. Louis N. Parker has translated not only freely but badly. Certain it is that his version is entirely made up of intolerable English clichés, whilst such a line as

Outstripping horsemen and pedestrians
would take high rank in any competition of banalities.
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The programme is sufficiently tentative. "This play is partly an allegory." From it, apparently, we are to deduce that sinful man is redeemed neither by faith nor by works, but by the love of some simpleton whom he has had the good fortune to betray. So long as the little ninny retains a shred of affection for the man who made her a wanton, so long shall the scoundrel pursue pleasure with impunity, since death is to prove not so much the gate of life as of life resumed with a pretty woman in a Heaven like the lid of a chocolate-box. This is conveyed to the audience by means of a tableau. Here the amorist affronting Death sees its awful lineaments change at an embrace to those of his one-time inamorata. This from a member of the race which has written most bitingly of le collage, or irritant satiety! The whole story is neither good morals nor good sense, and Mr. Parker does not persuade us that it is good poetry. Yet the fantasy might have come off, even with the handicap of foolish dialogue. It is the business of good actors so to transfigure nonsense that it sounds like the sublimation of sense. The scenery and costumes were formal and exquisite; in particular, the doorway leading to the hereafter was of fine proportion and design, its immense height firing the imagination like a drawing of Blake. The music was "good" in the nebulous way in which modern composers repeat one another, although it was unfair of M. André Gailhard to repeat the author of Schéhérazade to the extent of lifting whole themes. Nothing, in

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fact, was wrong except the words and the actors who had to speak them. Mr. Godfrey Tearle is in the name-part. Would, as Hazlitt said of his admired Miss Kelly, that he were a hundred miles away! Mr. Tearle, in certain rôles of intensity is admirable; his Othello is the best of our generation. But Arlequin is the negative of intensity. He is Pierrot, and there is no actor on the English stage less wistful and less elvish than Mr. Tearle. It would be incorrect to say that the actor had no notion of comedy. He made plentiful show of that notion and the most elaborate attempts to distil quaint melancholy from a personality essentially non-volatile. I am not going to count this performance as a failure; the actor should never have been cast for the part. As well cast Mr. Norman M'Kinnel! It was like watching some bull that walks the pastures mincing it as Puck. Or say a rogue in pewter. I am inclined to insist upon this point of mis-casting to forestall Mr. de Courville's possible "Look what happens when I offer the public a beautiful thing. They won't have it!" The public will have beauty when it is put on with discretion. Not one of the actors distilled beauty; they extracted it, and presented us with the leavings of the retort. For example, Miss Viola Tree proposed to run away with Arlequin in a voice commonly reserved for the Litany. White horses for the chaise were mentioned. "I love white," responded Mr. Tearle exactly as he would have said, "It is the cause." One can imagine the ripple and play of delight a French actor would

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have used, spiriting his soul to meet his lover's not only in the passion but also in the play of the escapade. Mr. Tearle was literally inflexible. Even at the very end, and a dying man, he clomb the stairway to death like a Lonsdale belt-holder mounting the steps of the National Sporting Club to defend his title. The spirit may have been weak, but the flesh remained heroic. Miss Moyna Macgill went through a long death-scene without a vestige of poetry, almost as though she were making depositions to a police-court missionary. Something not of this world was wanted; the actress almost showed you the number on the tenement door.

January 13.

"Angelo"

A ? BY ?

DRURY LANE

To condemn a new surgical operation because the first person who undergoes it happens to die, would be absurd. To say that Angelo is a grossly foolish example of a new method of production is not to argue that the method in itself is wrong. That the theatre should make surrender to the cinema may or may not be a good thing; possibly Mr. Arthur Collins may turn out to be as admirable an innovator as the actor who first played Brutus in a toga. There must have been an outcry when first the curtain drew up on bare Roman legs; recognition of greater verisimilitude can only have come later. Let me record for the present that as the Drury Lane performance wore on I not only ceased to look for a heightened or even a different quality of emotion, but began consciously to miss the normal pleasure of the theatre.

The play contains thirty-three scenes in which the actors speak, and eleven in which they are silent. These latter the programme significantly calls "pictures"; they are as much creations of the brain as Napoleon's backward glance at Waterloo, or Little

Eva's premonition of the angels. The whole of the stage is plunged in darkness, except for that little portion which reads for us what is passing in the mind of one of the characters. To facilitate the setting, each picture is on a different level and sometimes in a different plane from its fellows; the effect, to at least one spectator, is of extraordinary irritation. As with the pictures so with the scenes; the full stage is used on some half-dozen occasions only.

It is difficult not to confound future possibility with present failure. Part of the genius of the cinema lies in keeping the eye of the spectator so busy that he has not time to notice that his mind is idle, in the excitation and satisfaction of small expectances. At Drury Lane, the sum total of such consummations is forty-four which is some hundreds too few. Not only the immense variety, but also the rapidity of the cinema is absent; there is always an appreciable wait, and sometimes the wait is as long as the picture. The "shots" contained in the present production are either straightforwardly ugly like the worst kind of representational scenery, or feebly pretty like the drawings of Marcus Stone, or akin in their scalloped frames to the garishness of a box of candied fruits, or reminiscent of the Berlin-wool æstheticism and sorrows of Werther. But even if the pictures had been beautiful they could hardly have amounted to more than a costly form of that old-fashioned and depressing entertainment known as tableaux vivants. Another item in the cinema's appeal is its straightforwardness.

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Film-stories do at least begin at the beginning. A self-respecting screen-version of Hamlet, for instance, will begin with the precedent King of Denmark sleeping within his orchard, his custom always of the afternoon: if indeed it does not hark back to Claudius's first solicitations of Gertrude. The Ghost will use the "throw-back" of his murder to point his recital. and whenever Hamlet bethinks him of his revenge, it must be at the prompting of the by now familiar image. But for the rest the story will follow in order, enlarged, of course, out of all knowledge with "closeups" of the new king draining his draughts of Rhenish, and elaborations of the voyage to England, and so on and so forth. The use of the spectator's imagination will be abrogated, but he will get the benefit of whatever value there may be in a plain unvarnished sequence of events. The tale of Angelo happens to be a muddled one, as the synopsis given in the programme pathetically admits: "We are from time to time reminded that it is a story by being whisked back to Bruno's room, where Angelo is telling it." The story at its best provokes impatience—a farrago of German sentiment, imagery and fairy-tale, nursemaid's matter told in the oblique manner of Mr. Conrad at his most perverse. What exactly befell Angelo, and why, and when, and in what order, I could in no way discover.

It is probably more profitable to consider how much of gain this new method might bring to the theatre under the best conditions; to inquire what advantage might accrue if the story were either credible or of

moment or both, if it were well told, if the pictures were intrinsically beautiful or suggestive of beauty, if the waits were entirely done away with, if the accompanying music were something more than meanderings in futility. Personally I cannot see the possibility of any emotion here which the film cannot better. The actors have become so subservient to the décor that one ends by resenting them. They lose their fleshand-blood effectiveness without taking on the peculiar virtue of the marionette or the ballet-dancer. And it goes almost without saving that the art of the dramatist-which consists in selection, emphasis, and, by stimulating his imagination, the elevation of the spectator into responsible and active collaboration goes by the board. It is difficult to see that a play produced upon the lines of Angelo can ever possess æsthetic value higher than that of the film or the illustrated papers. You can have your super-film or your half-crown magazine, but the appeal remains essentially pictorial and, by its very comprehensiveness, essentially non-dramatic. I must think that this static quality was reflected in the apathy of the audience which, on the evening of my visit, was small and at times openly derisive. What there was of applause was persistently started by a single individual seated in the pit, who effectively, if unconsciously, fulfilled the function of a claqueur. One scene alone was hailed with spontaneous and general approvalthat of the fête at the Grand Duke's. Here the Mozartian atmosphere was captured; the remaining

scenes were like illustrations to *Die Gartenlaube's* dreary serials. Of interest in the play there was none.

It has never been my fortune to see Mr. Moscovitch in a reasonably good play, in matter which called for more than a superficial display of his abundant technique. I am convinced that this actor could run through his present part with his eyes shut, were it not for the necessity of finding his way in the dark from one cubby-hole to another. Angelo demands that kind of skill which enables the quick-change artist of the music-hall to impersonate Dick Turpin, Black Bess, the road to York, and the Cathedral Minster all inside two minutes. Mr. Moscovitch passes from youth to eld and back again with a facility which ceases to startle after the trick has been performed, say, a dozen times. And I really do not think that so ripe an actor, looking like Beethoven with a dash of Lord Lonsdale, should be asked to impersonate a callow composer questing for the theme of his first sonata in the branches of a tree, like a schoolboy on the look out for his first bird's-nest. Nor yet to imitate the male half of the Babes in the Wood, and lie him down while young ladies from Miss Pinkerton's Select Dancing Academy bestrew him with imaginary flowers. When there is any acting to be done, Mr. Moscovitch does it adequately; and his gestures and posturings strike one as those of a young man. But the plain truth of the matter is that this particular play is unactable rubbish. This is unimportant. What is important

is that this new method of production marks the cinema's first definite assault upon the theatre, an attack so badly marshalled in the present instance that we cannot judge of its ultimate strength.

April 7.

"London Calling!"

REVUE BY RONALD JEANS AND NOEL COWARD

DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE

OR years the critics have complained that the people who produce revues persistently ignore the wits whilst paying attention to the wigs, fretting themselves into a fever as to the covering of the actors' heads and indifferent to the clothing of their authors' minds. Latterly, there have been signs of a change, and in his present venture Mr. André Charlot has gone to the length of impressing in the person of Mr. Noel Coward, the youngest, and who shall say that that does not mean the brainiest, of our intellectuals. Is dulness the consequence, or is this revue rendered thereby "screamingly funny"? The answer, I think, is to be found in the serried rows of those grave and reverend signors, the critics, who, on Tuesday afternoon, forsook their glum misanthropy, and laughed themselves, so to speak, free of their critical toils.

In this connection three things come to mind which are not, perhaps, popularly accepted. The first is that, just as there is nothing quite so abysmally boring in the theatre as your author who has got no brow at all, so there is no wit like that of a high-

brow who is really witty and is not merely a humbug giving himself airs. The second is that, nine-tenths of criticism being a smacking of the lips or a rolling of the tongue—the art of tasting and appreciating, in a word—the critic who must hold both his sides is not divesting himself of his functions but fulfilling them. The third is that there is no reason to despise revue, which springs as much out of the temper of modern minds, as Greek drama from Greek thought, or the morality play from the desire to be preached to. Revue fits the times, and there is no critical sense in being sniffy about this particular form of dramatic art. London Calling! is one of the best revues I have ever seen.

To begin with it fulfils its function, which is that of slating public vanities and foibles by laughing at them. Miss Gertrude Lawrence pinks you prettily like an adroit fencer; she will play a whole scene like that entitled "Early Morning" with a verisimilitude worthy of Maupassant or Pett Ridge or any other great realist, doubled by a mockery which makes you nervous lest, somewhere in the house, there be a real Poppy Baker covering up her face for shame. Miss Lawrence, besides being an accomplished actress, is also a graceful dancer and a charming singer.

Miss Maisie Gay employs not so much the rapier and stiletto of wit as the belabouring cudgel of broad fun. Her caricature of an ultra-modern poetess declaiming "rhythmi-coloured" verses beginning "Phlegmatic are my feet," roused so much laughter

that many of the admirable lines were lost. Hernia Whittlebot, hung and festooned with bunches of grapes, has two brothers, Gob and Sago, who, when they list, and in a sad mingle of Harris-tweed bags and velvet jackets, grate on their scrannel pipes the leanest of accompaniments. It is, perhaps, a trifle cruel, but this is an over-squeamish age, and cruelty has its uses. The actress was good, too, as a fond mother trying to learn the fashionable slang. It is significant that the original "This motor-car is not even moderately efficient" was received with roars, whilst the more modern "The 'bus is a dud" was accepted as normal. Bravo, Mr. Jeans!

Miss Gay was possibly at her best in "What Love Means," where she portrayed a battered harridan of the kind Leech loved to draw. There was a queer, inverted pathos here, a glistening of the eye and a tremble of the lip which belied the grotesque words. And only a short while before the artist was revelling in the archness of fifty and the persistence of the favourite who will not leave the stage. She reproduced with extraordinary fidelity the technique that was accepted in our father's and grandfather's day. Miss Gay is the very genius of burlesque. Of the other artists I must single out Mr. Tubby Edlin, who in his doubling of the droll with the woebegone has something of the quality of Dan Leno. He can sing of glorious Devon, and take all the glory out of it. Mr. Coward, as actor, is something of a difficulty. He is both self-conscious and self-assertive, and not, I think, a very great success.

The scenery is formal and charming, the dresses are exquisite, and I shall visit the show again as soon as the little lady in the typewriting scene shall have learned to sing in tune.

September 9.

"The Blue Bird"

From the Imperial Theatre, Moscow

NEW SCALA

IKE the Chauve-Souris Theatre, The Blue Bird combines the extremes of childlikeness and sophistication, unclouded naïveté of outlook and the most intense artistic consciousness. There is a shattering poignancy in many of these scenes, which moves the heart like some page from Dostoievsky. As these marvellous pictures are discovered it is as though the heart of Russia were being laid bare; and it is a dull mind upon which, at one or other disclosure, no perception dawns as to the case for Revolution. The scene entitled "Burlaki," depicting haulers on the Volga, is agony seized at its supreme moment, agony of body stopping short of ecstasy, since the mind is gone. These seven pulling on the rope are spiritually dead. Two of them are young. One has the features of a Christ in whom faith is as a lamp which has gone out, the other has the head of a Joan of Arc listless and benumbed. The rest, one of whom hides his face, are nameless horrors, and as they stand to the rope, careless of the sunset against

which they are poised, you know existence as a world-without-end pain.

"Barrel Organ" has all the ache of the streets, the smart of rehearsed and mechanical gaiety. Here is none of that English sentimentality, which will set "A che la Morte" "pulsing with the sunset-glow," and lighting up the eyes of the passer-by with a "wild Italian gleam." The emotion is not the lively, casual one of the wayfarer, but the dead heart of the mendicant who turns the handle, of the drab who quavers and throws a lifeless somersault, of the half-wit comprehending alms and no more. "Catherine the Great," in bronze, at whose feet are pedestalled a great statesman, a famous general, and a poet, all of her time, harks back to the St. Petersburg that was. The thing is a monument to the mind as well as to the eve. As the Empress sings of Voltaire and Sans-Souci the lights go up in the restaurant behind the statue, and down some avenue the files of soldiers pass. Catherine's General salutes the Danube; light thickens and fades. The Empress, St. Petersburg, Russia, are again one with the past, death and nothingness.

And here, perhaps, the sturdy English mind is likely to rebel. Can even the Russian, whose whole life is misery, be wretched for successive quarters of an hour? Does the hauler on the Volga know nothing of bread and cheese and beer? Is that beggarly menage utterly without joy? Shall the new Petrograd know no cakes and ale? We are inclined to think that these Russians parade their melancholy a

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trifle too insistently. There is something a little ghoulish even about their pleasantries. "The Cossacks" is cruel, in spite of the prancing horses and the flowery mead. "Evening Bells" has nothing pastoral about it. In place of "these dells," which Moore walked and sung to such innocent purpose, there is a belfried view of a sleeping city, the descent to which is sheer, like a sudden failure of the spirit. This is an exquisite picture, which again must sadden the beholder. Even "Time is Money," the skit on American romanticism, is strangely sober of hue. To Russian eyes, America may look like three sandwich-men and half a dozen wax models. Sovereign stupidity may or may not rule over there, but if you are going to tear a country to pieces you should expose, I think, something more vital than the spleen.

Lest I should appear to be carping, let me say straight out that the show, as a whole, is one of strange, exotic, wilful and wistful beauty, and one which no lover of the theatre should miss. The first item, "The King called for his Drummer," is the richest and most significant stage-picture which I have ever known. The King's hand, extended against the dark background, is whole dramas in folio; and the very texture of the brocades and the manner of their disposal speaks to you like a scene out of a play. I do not know what is the art-jargon to be applied here; I can only suggest that this is the theatre of the eye. If I may offer a hint to the management, it is

that they should do away with the blue lights at the entrance, which turn the theatre into something half-way between the Egyptian Hall and Tutankhamen's tomb. Also that they should shorten the intervals between each scene. The music is good, and Mdlle. Shuster fiddles delightfully. But there will always be talk in England during interludes, however musical. At this Russian theatre chatter is inevitable. Not all the nine symphonies of Beethoven playing together would keep me from discussing with my neighbour so challenging a thing as the Haulers' Song.

Nothing is to be said of individual actors. They play together with extraordinary delicacy, finish, humour, and understanding.

October 4.

The Music Hall



The Music Hall

I T is well to test theory by practice. Holding that the average music-hall performance contains at least ten times the acting talent of the average revue, I looked in the other evening at the Alhambra. The opening "turn" hardly confirmed my view. A large lady, whose name I mercifully withhold, was singing. Her enunciation was so poor that, with the exception of one fatuous sentence, I did not gather a single word. She might have been singing in gibberish or Gaelic.

Then came Mr. Leslie Stuart, who played the symphonies and accompaniments of his old songs to the singing of Mr. Harry Barratt. How good these old melodies were in their day, and how much better than the negroid cacophony of the present! A hush which could almost be felt fell on the crowded house for "The Lily of Laguna" and "My Little Octoroon." And then the audience began to hum under its breath, for old times' sake. Doubtless many of us beheld in the mind's eye the slim, fleeting figure of Eugene Stratton, one of the halls' fondest memories. Altogether, this was a very perfect quarter of an hour.

Mr. Harry Herbert followed. Mr. Herbert is a droll of genius with the air of a caricature by Lewis

Baumer, and it was bad economy to limit him to a single song—a dithyrambic view of marriage—although in it he accomplished as much in a demolitionary way as Mr. Wells achieves in a whole novel. Mr. Herbert is a flute of many stops, each more riotous than the other, and an authentic incarnation of British humour.

After him came the Haines English Ballet, which has reference to the art of dancing. There was not a high kick in this ballet, but there was some graceful emotion.

And now came a turn of infinite provocation— Mesdames Nellie and Sara Kouns. For the purposes of identification, these ladies should be labelled. though perhaps it would be a distinction without a difference. The programme hails them as "mirrorvoiced," which may mean that their voices are alike. They are. Indifferently they announce that they will select from a répertoire containing Strauss, Rimsky-Korsakov, Gounod, and Bishop. What they actually sing is "O sole mio" and "Il Bacio." Then either Sara or Nellie, in the robes and tiara of a heroine from one of Meyerbeer's operas, and the attitude of La Tosca horrified before the body of Scarpia, gives forth "Annie Laurie." It is indeed a tragic song-scena. The actress-cantatrice first takes up a strategic position behind the grand piano, then creeps round the tail end with all the caution of a burglar robbing a bank, finally laying herself doon and dee-ing at full height and in a commanding pose in full view of the audience. It is very amusing, and the tragedy of it all

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is greatly to the taste of the house. Both ladies can, and do, sing.

Messrs. Noni and Horace conclude the show. Horace is so-so, but M. Noni is magnificently absurd. I stick to my thesis.

Every time a new musical comedy is announced I solace myself with a visit to an old-fashioned musichall. The first part of the programme at the Victoria Palace was like the soldier's description of the Egyptian desert—miles and miles and miles of nothing in particular, or words to that effect. Then came Mr. Harry Dearth, accompanied by the Misses Dorothy and Ethel Varick. Mr. Dearth battled gamely against too much piano and a self-willed fiddle, which, played some yards off at the other side of the apartment. seemed desirous of breaking away from the entente. Miss Dorothy Varick, whom I remember as a diseuse of great daintiness, has coarsened her method so much that she delivers even a sentimental refrain like a stump oration in Hyde Park. When will music-hall artists learn to distinguish between genuine and perfunctory applause? The purely formal quality of the hand-clapping should have notified this trio that to perform the "Humoresque" of Dvoràk, "Annie Laurie," and "The Swanee River" simultaneously is to ruin three good things. Whereas the simple and artistic glee-singing of the Gresham Singers was received with genuinely felt enthusiasm. As for Mr. George Carney, I will only say that I once devoted to

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him a whole essay in a printed book, and that if he goes on being so good I shall serve him up again.

The first and last turns are notoriously the least advantageous for the artist. In both cases the public is preoccupied with its hat. I was about to fish for mine when the Hartley Wonders came on. And then something in the tones and gestures of the acrobat's girl-assistant made me sit up again and resume notice. There is a humour of the body as well as of the mind, and it is unusual to find it in a woman. The gusto with which this girl swept up whole armfuls of chairs, and the largesse with which she disposed them about the stage, her faculty for setting akimbo not only arms but all other available and unavailable joints and articulations, her mingling of virtuosity and spoof, brazen bravura and clumsy bashfulness, the way she led you to expect some traditional music-hall conceit and the sudden decline into bathos-all this betokened a power of vis comica which is altogether rare. I judge the artist to be of Lancashire origin: her speech bewrayeth her. This is to say that her fun depends from real life and observation, rather than from imitation of some other comedienne, which is the London way. The audience enjoyed her enormously, and paid no attention to the gentleman who was jumping into barrels and over chairs. Did he fail or succeed? Nobody, noticed. I should like to see this acrobat's assistant in a West End musical comedy. But perhaps the Balkans wouldn't be able to stand it.

Grock was in great form at the Coliseum on Tuesday evening. This actor is always at his best when it is obvious that he, too, has taken a seat at the banquet of folly of which he is the host. Lamb, we remember, strongly opposed the notion that a man must not laugh at his own jest. "This," said Charles, "is to expect a gentleman to give a treat without partaking of it; to sit esurient at his own table and commend the flavour of his venison upon the absurd strength of his never touching it himself." On Tuesday last this great clown laughed as heartily at Grock as we at him.

Grock's fun, when he is at his best, seems begotten of the occasion. It is as though he had never before had that little trouble with the keyboard-lid, and had that evening, for the very first time, conceived the notion of sliding down it to the floor. In this little manœuvre we see all the art of the well-made playthe art of preparation. The lid will keep tumbling on to the player's fingers, and therefore demands removal. Partner behaving obstreperously, what more natural than that Grock should snatch it up as a medium of remonstrance, or that, melting in his own good humour, he should lean it up against the piano ready for that piece of virtuosity in sliding? This is playmaking as it is immemorially understood, and practised by none better than Grock's compatriots. There is a whole comedy by Scribe or Legouvé, Halévy or Labiche in that manipulation of the keyboard-lid.

Looking, recently, into one of those humourless

guides to the psychology of laughter, I wondered how it was that none of the authorities quoted, from Descartes to Freud, explains the whole of Grock. Some, so far from explaining him a little, would seem to negative him altogether. Take, at hazard, Immanuel Kant. "Laughter," says that unfunny philosopher, "is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing." As if Grock did not fulfil expectation and beyond our wildest hopes! He is not one of your comedians who are reasonably funny; with him performance outruns promise to a quite unreasonable degree. Bergson more nearly explains him when he says that many a comic form, which cannot be explained by itself, can only be understood from its resemblance to another, which only makes us laugh by reason of its relationship with a third, and so on indefinitely.

We can perhaps explain the comicality of Grock's walk up-stage in those immensely baggy trousers by that view of an elephant which they suggest. But why is a retreating elephant funny? Probably from the incongruity to be established between our idea of size—implying moral as well as every other sort of grandeur—and those drooping quarters and humiliating tail. As Grock retreats behind the screen he is exactly like a tail-less elephant, and thus we arrive at Hazlitt's definition of the ridiculous—"that which is contrary not only to custom, but to sense and reason."

Note how, before reaching the screen, and still with 290

his back to us, our friend has deposited bow and fiddle on the floor, the bow to his right and fiddle to his left. Returning, he takes them up, only to find that he must now attack his instrument left-handedly. This is relativity, and so pure Einstein. And thus you may go through Grock's bag-of-tricks. They are all pure Somebody-or-other in the philosophic world. But it is never the wise men who explain him; he it always is who elucidates them. This clown "surprises by himself" all the philosophies. Or say that one touch of Grock makes the wiseacres kin.

Watching this supreme genius the lines come to mind:

"Cherchez les effets et les causes,"
Nous disent les rêveurs moroses.
Des mots! des mots! cueillons les roses.

In other words, a live Grock is a better mentor than all dead-and-gone theorists. Let us, then, desist from arguing and take tickets for the Coliseum. The little poem might, one thinks, have been as fittingly dedicated to our subject as to Adolphe Gaiffe.

Jeune homme sans mélancolie, Blond comme un soleil d'Italie.

Perhaps "young" is not quite the word, and our friend is not more than morally blond. Yet there is something golden about that dome of his which recalls a shaven field glistening in the Italian sun. "Sans mélancolie" is, perhaps, not perfect felicity. Like

Leno and like Chaplin, Grock has pathos, and pathos is kin to melancholy. But

Garde bien ta belle folie

is entirely fitting.

The philosophers may have their sense on condition that Grock keeps firm hold of his lovely nonsense.

July 9, September 9, October 16.

A Survey



A Survey

EVER, it must be said firmly, has the theatre loomed more largely in the public consciousness than during 1923. Repertory theatres have sprung up in two important centres, Oxford and Bristol; those at Birmingham and Liverpool have gone on from strength to strength, while even defunct Manchester has been heard knocking on the coffin-lid. Playgoers' clubs and debating societies have had unparalleled attendances. At least one firm of publishers has devoted a large proportion of its output to works connected with the drama. The younger Sunday evening theatres—Repertory Players, Play Actors, Fellowship of Players-have shown astonishing enthusiasm; the Phœnix Society has done brilliantly, while the comparative inactivity of the Stage Society has been, I will presume, only a collecting of strength for the fine programme now promised us in the immediate future.

One thing, however, must always be borne in mind. Important though the work of the repertory theatres and play-producing Societies must always be, it can hardly be more than tentative. There is little use in pretending that the bulk of the public is interested in pioneering. The great public pines for no seat on

the steam-roller, and wants only to jog comfortably in the 'bus along the smooth highroad. In other words, the "high-brow" theatres, though they are of immense æsthetic importance in influencing the play of to-morrow, are insignificant compared with the commercial, or practical, theatre which produces the play of to-day.

The commercial theatre is the one which is visited by ninety-nine per cent. of the general public, and it is the only one which sends out regular touring companies. As far as Manchester, for instance, is concerned, the "high-brow" theatre and the playproducing society virtually do not exist. Manchester, which committed repertory suicide some ten years ago, is like all the other towns which possess no theatre of their own in this, that she is dependent for her theatrical pabulum upon second-rate versions of Shaftesbury Avenue successes. And Shaftesbury Avenue failures, too. My heart sinks when I think that Nottingham, Leicester, Derby, Huddersfield, York, Newcastle, etc., etc., must batten upon mediocrity shoo'd off the West End stage, and advertised as "The London Success direct from the Magnolia Theatre." But when the "Full London Company," none of whose names I know, presents itself at Manchester my heart is filled with joy. That city has got what she deserves.

But even in the ordinary theatre the year has been a remarkable one. I cannot remember a time when the productions of the London commercial manager have attained so high a pitch of artistic excellence. Honour to whom honour is due, and I say without any fear of contradiction that we have in our midst to-day two managers of whom English theatrical history will one day be proud. I refer, of course, to Mr. C. B. Cochran and Mr. Basil Dean, who, under their so different skins, are brothers in the sense that both are, at heart, artists.

Mr. Cochran brought over to England, after many years, the greatest living player of the day and one of the most exquisite artists of any age-Eleonora Duse. He gave us a season of the Guitrys, sublime farceurs whose message is that great art need not always pull a long face, and a season of Miss Pauline Lord in an American play of which the first three acts will stand comparison with anything written "on this side" since Ibsen. Anna Christie drew all the people in London capable of appreciating it. It may not have made a fortune-I do not know about those matters, and I do not want to know. What I realise is that it ran for a sufficient length of time for all the forty thousand theatrically intelligent people in London to see it. They saw it, and the piece and production were an immense success. It is obvious that a manager who flies at the highest game must have humbler means of making a livelihood. You cannot exist by shooting birds of paradise. therefore it behoves criticism to deal more gently with such domesticities as Little Nellie Kelly than it might otherwise do.

Mr. Dean's triumphs have been spectacular and complete. Hassan is a noble monument erected in an arena which one had come to look upon as a circus; The Likes of Her is a slice of the kind of luck which all who play games know will attend the man who is playing well; R.U.R. was an inspiration. The Playbox Theatre is adventure along the right lines, though it may sometimes produce the wrong plays. Mr. Dean is still inclined to dragoon his audiences a little, and is himself something in thrall to a lighting apparatus, after the manner of a small boy with his first bull'seye lantern. But these things are nothing.

I shall do no more than salute Miss Baylis and pass on. Let those who seek a monument to her in her lifetime cock an eye at the "Old Vic.," whose glories are too familiar to need recapitulation. Mr. Nigel Playfair had leisure thrust upon him by the continued success of The Beggar's Opera, and he turned that leisure to admirable account. The Insect Play did not survive the casting of the characters in the first act, but it was a gallant venture. Robert E. Lee was a fine play, finely done.

The Everyman Theatre behaved itself extremely well throughout the year, and blotted its copy-book twice, and twice only. Once was when it produced a silly little play "by arrangement," whatever that may mean; the other occasion was when it failed to interest Hampstead in Mr. Halcott Glover's The Second Round. But the fault this time was not the theatre's, but that of its supporters. This theatre

first produced Outward Bound, an imaginative feat on the part of the management for which no praise can be too high. With all its inaccessibility, the Everyman Theatre remains one of the first in London. Mr. Cochran, Mr. Dean, Miss Baylis, Mr. Playfair, Mr. Macdermott—these make up a quintet of theatrical managers whose achievements during the twelvemonth have never been surpassed in any year in the history of the English theatre. To these must be added Mr. Donald Calthrop's admirable essays in Shakespeare at the Kingsway.

I have not forgotten the work of the Theatre Guild. This is a young organisation which won one spur with Ambush and the other with its quick appropriation of the Everyman success, Outward Bound. May good luck attend this latest entrant into the lists. It must be confessed that the crop of good new plays in the commercial theatre is now nearly gathered. Sir Arthur Pinero, Sir James Barrie, Mr. Bernard Shaw, and Mr. Masefield have been silent. Mr. Sutro, Mr. Milne, and Mr. Henry Arthur Iones have given us some things which I venture to hold to be very much beneath their best work. Chapin, Davies, and Hankin have been allowed to sleep. Mr. Drinkwater had one great success and one failurealmost, one fears, even of esteem-in Cromwell. Mr. Munro saw one light and delicious comedy successfully produced; his big work, The Rumour, fell upon managerial deafness of the most incurable kind. Mr. Noel Coward had a disappointment with

his clever comedy, The Young Idea; Miss Dorothy Brandon an unexpected success with her interesting The Outsider.

The best satirical comedy of the year, in my opinion, was and is Mr. Maugham's Our Betters, at the Globe Theatre, closely followed by Mr. Maltby's Three Birds. There have been the usual number of idiotic and semi-idiotic farces, and some sentimental light comedies, all of which were, with one exception, blameless. The exception was attended to by the critics, and not attended by the public, and so rapidly disappeared. To conclude this short review of the commercial theatre, there has been a revival of "thick-ear" melodrama in which Mr. William Archer has been found in Mr. George Arliss's corner.

And now I want to say something about two of the younger play-producing Societies—the Repertory Players and the Play Actors. Both have shown extraordinary enthusiasm; in one case no fewer than eight productions have been achieved in the twelvemonth. But, frankly, the plays have not always been good enough, and on one or two occasions they have attained depths of banality ignored even of the commercial manager. One of these Societies has publicly congratulated itself on the ground that five of its productions have been "sold" commercially. This leaves me unmoved; and at once I begin to doubt the æsthetic value of a play which has only to be seen to be purchased. The managers did not so jump at *Uncle Vanya* and *The Rumour*.

One of the avowed aims of the Stage Society is to produce plays which, but for the pioneer work done by their good selves, would not be seen in the ordinary theatre. I would recommend the younger Societies to go one better, and aim at the production of pieces which, in spite of pioneering, will never be purchased. Very little money, I am told, accrues to the Society out of sales; and, I beg to point out, little credit, since the original actors are seldom cast for the commercial production, and the indebtedness to the Society is seldom acknowledged. Let the plays be chosen then, (a) purely for their æsthetic value as plays, and (b) as vehicles for acting. And let light comedy be avoided as much as possible. You cannot create a Seymour Hicks in the course of a single Sunday evening; and the genre is much the most difficult of all, save for the master-actors. A middling performance of King Lear is, at least, a remembrancer of the text; a mediocre exhibition of Tea for Two is an immitigable offence.

Mr. Nigel Playfair remarked the other day that the Committee of the Repertory Players met twice a week and read four hundred plays during the year. I know those plays. Some of them come to me with a request for my opinion, but without the return postage, and I must spend one morning a week hunting for paper and string. A glance at a single page generally suffices; these inarticulate meanderings are obviously first cousin to that novel of "more than usually revolting sentimentality" perpetrated by the youthful Miss Prism.

My constructive advice to these reading committees is (a) to give up indiscriminate reading; (b) to purchase The Youngest Drama, by Mr. Ashley Dukes, and read such plays of which the descriptions and plots point to feasibility; (c) to ask for the catalogue of Messrs. Ernest Benn Ltd., and read the plays contained therein; (d) to ask Mr. Walkley to jot down on a postcard the names of such modern French plays as will bear transplanting; (e) to keep in wireless touch with Mr. St. John Ervine as he playgoes throughout the capitals of the educated world; (f) to purge themselves, i.e. the committees, of all actors—this will be the most difficult, as it is the most vital of these ordinances; (g) to replace the actors, whose business it is to act, by selectors of knowledge and taste, fit to judge of the material most worthy to be set before actors; (b) to abandon finally the idea that the Societies exist to fag for the lazy, unimaginative commercial manager.

Adding the Fellowship of Players—to whom the above prescriptions do not apply, since the Fellowship is devoted entirely to Shakespeare—we come upon one rather remarkable thing. This thing, which I want the reader to note equally with me, is that almost every one of the coming actors and actresses of our stage are connected with one or more of these five Societies. The fortunes of the play rest, when all is said, at the long last in the hands of the players. The essence of the drama is that it is a thing to be acted—from which we are not to deduce that the actor comes first and the play nowhere. But there

cannot be any play without actors, not even a little one; that is the important thing. There can, of course, be great actors without any play to speak of—Bernhardt was the supreme example. But in the long progress of the drama, as distinct from theatrical virtuosity, such players do not count. For a time they put out every other light in the firmament by their exceeding glory. They vanish, and, behold, it is as though they had never existed. At their most brilliant they were no more than cometary dust.

Regretfully, then, we must recognise the existence of actors and actresses in England to-day who continue by virtue of the flame of their talent, or even genius, but have long left the path of any drama which counts. I shall not mention names—these are the players who have endeared themselves to two or three generations of theatre-goers in the flummery of cape-and-sword romance, crude melodrama, and sentimental twaddle. Fate, in its irony, condemns them to continue in endearing, even to the fourth and fifth generation. Peebles, Paisley, St. Helens, Wigan, Manchesterthere must be devastating monotony in this round of unimportant glory. Occasionally the comet proaches as near as, say Golders Green. We renew acquaintance, and we perceive that for these players the Drama has stood still for forty years. It is the young actors and actresses of the Five Societies who keep English drama alive. Their betters stifle itif, indeed, they are betters.

Let me take my courage in both hands and declare

that there never was a time when acting on the English stage stood at so high a level as to-day. Admitted that we have neither a Kean nor an Irving, but I am not sure that we want one. Let me forestall the complaint that I am belittling the great: Irving had the most blazing genius of any player I have seen, save one. But the Drama has advanced beyond these magnoperative egoists. It has something to express besides the great actor.

I simply do not believe that there ever was a period when there were four such Shakespearean actors, playing ten or a dozen parts a season, and, thanks to the Societies, playing "opposite" each other, as Messrs. Baliol Holloway, Frank Cellier, Ion Swinley, and Hay Petrie. To enumerate their several parts would take too long; I will only say that whenever, being off duty, I think by accident of the theatre, it is always in terms of one of these four actors. Mr. Godfrey Tearle, whose Othello was a greater single performance than any achieved by the quartet, loses his place through the comparative slightness of his remainder parts; Mr. Robert Atkins, whose Richard was magnificent, is absorbed in his admirable productions. The next name which comes into my mind is Mr. Leslie Faber. Here is an actor who wants careful casting. Why do we not see him as Iago? I remember, during the performance of Mr. Hackett's Macbeth, looking at my programme for the name of the player who made so moving a figure of Macduff. It was Mr. Faber. Add Henry Clegg, and you get an artist from whom one would not withhold the word "great."

Hassan monopolises too many of our good actors. There is Mr. Malcolm Keen, whose Caliph could have been deduced from his German Officer in The Burgomaster of Stilemonde. Here is another Iago. Here, too, are Mr. Leon Quartermaine, an exquisite player in any rôle, but best of all in the plays of Tchehov; and Mr. Esmé Percy, whose admirable work in production has tempted Mr. Dean to forget his lieutenant's quite extraordinary power of romantic acting. His Lonny Copshrews should have been a reminder. The Likes of Her takes up too much of Mr. Leslie Banks and Mr. Ian Hunter, both actors of considerable achievement and promise. Mr. Banks's Robot and East End rough show the fine character actor. Singularly beautiful performances have been given by Messrs. William Stack, Leo Carroll, Michael Sherbrook, Roy Byford, Randle Ayrton, Lawrence Anderson, Claude Rains, Frederick Cooper, Stanley Lathbury, and Francis Lister.

Let me jot down the names of a few actors who have given performances of distinction. No inference is to be drawn concerning actors not in this list. I shall simply mention, without significance in the way of order, Messrs. Franklin Dyall, Nicholas Hannen, O. B. Clarence, Allan Jeayes, Edmund Willard, Ivan Berlyn, Andrew Leigh, Felix Aylmer, Harold Anstruther, Reginald Owen, Reginald Bach, Harold Scott, Tarver Penna, Horace Hodges, Edmund

Breon, Ronald Squire, Henry Kendall, Brember Wills, Richard Bird, Wilfrid Walter, Duncan Yarrow, Raymond Massey, Victor Lewisohn, and Ernest Thesiger.

Every conscientious observer of the year's acting must have been struck by two things—the extraordinary advance made by two of our younger actresses, and the too rare appearances of some of our most exquisite artists. Miss Margaret Bannerman accomplished the feat known to astronomers of bursting in a single night from a comparatively feeble twinkle to the radiance and lustre of a star of the first magnitude. Miss Isobel Elsom, too, arrived at a bound at a sufficiency about which there was something magnificent. Nothing during the year has given me greater pleasure than to record these two remarkable successes.

But why have we not seen more of Miss Haidée Wright, Miss Helen Haye, Miss Agnes Thomas, and Miss Henrietta Watson? Why, seeing her a fair number of times, has not the public made more fuss of that exquisite player, Miss Louise Hampton? This is an artist of the very front rank. Beautiful performances have been given, as they must always be given, by Miss Clare Greet, Miss Athene Seyler, Miss Barbara Gott, Miss Grace Lane, Miss Jean Cadell, Miss Mary Clare, Miss Constance Collier, Miss Ada King, Miss Laura Cowie, Miss Maire O'Neill, Miss Auriol Lee, and Miss Margaret Yarde. Miss Phyllis Neilson-Terry has made, unless my memory is at

fault, appearance in one play only. This is not enough. Miss Gladys Cooper's popularity waxes exceedingly, whether she enters as Paula, Magda, or Kiki.

The battle for pre-eminence still rages between Miss Sybil Thorndike and Miss Edith Evans. Monday finds me relentlessly for the one, Tuesday remorselessly for the other. Alas that our one and only tragédienne has as yet found no middle way. She must be astride on the heights with Medea or condescending to droring-room melodrama. What she wants is another Ibsen.

Miss Evans has fulfilled all prophecy. She found humanity in Capel Sion, and sisterhood in the serpents of old Eden and old Nile. And now comes her Mistress Page. I salute both artists. Go it, Pasta; bravo, Malibran! Miss Thorndike is to give us Joan of Arc; let her rival counter with a Beatrice. There should be much a-doing next year.

A paragraph to herself alone is due to Miss Hermione Baddeley. It is nonsense to pretend that this little actress's genius first declared itself in *The Likes of Her*. Her great gift jumped to the eyes in the Stage Society's performance of *The Mental Athletes*. I could wish that she would learn to walk, talk, and hold herself properly. Complete mistress of the XYZ of her art, she knows little of the ABC. With care she may become a very great actress.

It may be urged that I have concentrated attention upon the younger players. Exactly. That is my

whole point. These are the artists in whose hands lies the future of the English theatre. The health of any art depends upon the spiritual youth of its practitioners. An actor may be full of fight at seventy and out of the battle at twenty-five. I make no apologies.

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